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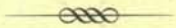

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Adam Goodheart

NARROW RULED
Nicholson Baker

STARTING FROM SCRATCH
Roger Shattuck

FIRE
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Life is our dictionary.
—RALPH WALDO EMERSON, "The American Scholar," 1837

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Commonplace Books

As the scholar and preacher Thomas Fuller wrote in 1642, "A common-place-book contains many notions in garrison, whence the owner may draw out an army into the field." In his day, every educated gentleman maintained such a garrison, a hand-copied collection of memorable passages from which he could draft apposite quotations.

In this issue, Nicholson Baker, who will write the "At Large and At Small" column each autumn, describes his own commonplace books: seven narrow-ruled, spiral-bound notebooks in which, for nineteen years, he has copied out favorite passages from his reading. "I always use longhand," he explained to me. "I type very quickly and sloppily, and if I were to use a computer, I wouldn't think about the words and sentences as units but as a kind of freight train of letters. The act of copying by hand seems worshipful, almost ritualistic, like laying out a formal tablecloth."

In "Starting from Scratch," Roger Shattuck writes, "One of the simplest aids to grasping, for example, a difficult passage from *Finnegans Wake* or a poem by Hopkins is simply to copy it, phrase by phrase, longhand, so that every letter and dash claims its place." That's exactly how contributing editor André Bernard compiles THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR's own "Commonplace Book," each issue's omnium-gatherum of quotations on a particular theme, in which Pliny the Elder is likely to rub shoulders with Bill Bradley. After he finishes work as Editor in Chief of Harvest Books, Bernard repairs to the wood-paneled library of a venerable New York literary club, yellow legal pad and black felt-tipped pen in hand, and settles down with a tall stack of books for his commonplace hunt. "I would never type or Xerox," he says. "When I write out a passage by Boswell, I feel at one with his prose."

Bernard's "Commonplace Book" department grew from an idea suggested three years ago by Adam Goodheart, the author of this issue's lead article, "The Last Island of the Savages." I never got to edit Boswell, but I had the privilege of editing Goodheart, and I felt at one with *his* prose when I copied into his piece (admittedly, by word processor) a couple of passages reclaimed from an earlier draft. As it happened, one of the passages I transcribed included a quotation from Thoreau containing two famous words that summed up the exercise: "*Contact! Contact!*"

A. F.

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AT LARGE AND AT SMALL

Narrow Ruled

NICHOLSON BAKER

When I come across something I really like in a book, I put a little dot in the margin. Not a check, not a double line—these would be pedantic—but a single, nearly invisible tap or nudge of the pen-tip that could almost be a dark fleck in the paper. In fact, sometimes as I've flipped through a book that I've read closely years before, my eye has been caught by an actual paper-blemish that I have taken to be one of my own dots of approval, and I've stopped to read slowly through some undistinguished passage, prepared for beauty—and sometimes the beauty is discoverably there, and sometimes it isn't, and then, suspicious, I bring the page close to my eye and inspect the dot and find that I was misled.

It's best not to make too many dots—no more than, say, ten or fifteen in a single book. Compared with underlining, or highlighting in yellow or pink, the dot method is unobtrusive—that's one of its great advantages. I can reread a book that I have dotted here and there, and yet not be too distracted by the record of my earlier discoveries. And I can feel secure in the knowledge that if others idly open my books, they won't be able to see at a glance what interested me—they won't say to themselves, He thought *that* was good?

But my method is not only to mark the passages I like. I also write the numbers of the marked pages in the back. Then—and this is the most important part—at some later date, sometimes years later, I refer to the page numbers, locate the dots, and copy in a spiral-bound notebook the passages that have awaited my return. About fifteen years ago I started to fall behind—I have dozens, probably hundreds of books with a column of page numbers written on the endpapers whose appealing sentences or paragraphs I have not yet transcribed. Sometimes many months will go by without my adding anything to my copy-book. But it is almost the only handwriting I do now, aside from writing checks, and whenever I take up the studious pen and begin, it makes me a happier person: my own bristling brain-urchins of worry melt in the strong solvent of other people's grammar.

My first notebook dates from 1982, when I was twenty-five. On page 2 is a sentence from Boswell's *Life of Johnson*: "I passed many hours with him, of which I find all in my memorial is, 'much laughing.'" Back then, I did a lot of the copying on lunch hours in Boston, and on weekends at a dark restaurant near Park Street Station called the Mug 'n Muffin, where I ordered a coffee and a blueberry muffin, which would arrive sizzling, after two full minutes in the industrial microwave, too hot to remove from its fluted wrapper, and which then, as I obliviously transcribed, would slowly turn to stone. At nearby tables, Bible students from Park Street Church would have long, hoarse conversations about God's love, shaking their heads over His mercy as they stubbed out their cigarettes. Every few months at the Mug 'n Muffin there was a rich, almost chocolaty smell of some comprehensive insecticide. It was the perfect place for longhand.

I've filled seven notebooks since then—not many, I admit, but they loom large. They are all spiral-bound: the spiral is itself inspirational, a bit of chromium cursiveness worming through and uniting otherwise easily scattered pages, just as handwritten script links together what is, on the book's page, an un-umbilicaled sequence of discrete letters. Over the years, I have

---

Nicholson Baker's books include *Vox*, *The Mezzanine*, *The Size of Thoughts*, and, most recently, *The Everlasting Story of Nory*.

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stepped on some of the notebooks by mistake, so that their pages turn less freely than they once did: it is as difficult to restore a bent spiral binding as it is to repair an overstressed Slinky. In 1983, contact-lens solution leaked through the pages of one notebook in my briefcase, obliterating parts of passages from Bacon, Anthony Powell, Darwin, Johnson, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, as well as the word "Memory" in a sentence from Martin F. Tupper's *Proverbial Philosophy* (1838) that I had found reading the *OED*'s entry on rote: "Memory is not wisdom: idiots can rote volumes." Still, despite these injuries, the page-turning, and the reading, continues to be extremely satisfying.

As a rule I transcribe the work of people who wrote a long time ago. It is a way of momentarily reanimating them, slowly unwinding their sentential shrouds; it is the only sure way to sense their idiosyncrasies. Sometimes I whisper the words while I copy them. On December 5, 1994, I copied something from Richard Porson (1759–1808), a classical scholar who could recite much of Smollett's *Roderick Random* by heart, but who drank too much and wrecked his life. "Anyone might become as good a critic as I am," Porson says, "if he would only take the trouble to make himself so. I have made myself what I am by intense labour; sometimes in order to impress a thing on my memory I have read it a dozen times and transcribed it six." I was struck by this before I copied it over, but only by copying it over did I notice the unobtrusive poise of "make himself so." Porson spent years in poverty; from him I also transcribed this sentence: "I used often to lie awake through the whole night, and wish for a large pearl."

My notebooks are seven and three-quarter inches tall and five inches wide; they originally contained eighty sheets. (I've torn out pages in the backs of some of them.) They are all "narrow ruled." The first one has a postcard from the National Gallery of Bellini's Saint Jerome taped to the cover—I wanted to cover up the words "university note book" printed in eighties moderno-lowercase type. Bellini's Jerome is an old man in knotted rags reading a big red book in front of a superb thesaurus of rock formations. A lion sleeps nearby. A more recent copy-book bears a postcard of Albrecht Dürer's Saint Jerome—the light through the bottle-glass windows in Dürer's interpretation of Jerome's study casts rows of shadows on the wall that resemble schematic drawings of plant cells, or softly spiraled cinnamon rolls arranged on trays, and there is a lordly gourd or squash presiding from an eyelet in a roof beam. The coiled feelers of this vegetable have nothing to entwine; they exult in their mid-air inflections and self-induced spiral bindings. My Dürer-decorated notebook begins with a vocabulary word, *phlyctenule*, that I found reading *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (1975): a phlyctenule, for those who may be curious, is a small pustule on the cornea. I was interested in the disgusted "flick" that begins it, interested that it included its own revulsion—words with exotically unknowable foreign roots sometimes survive because we hear ordinary meanings in them.

On January 15, 1988, and then again on June 7, 1994 (forgetting that I'd already done it once), I transcribed George Saintsbury's judgment of a certain work of Erasmus. It comes from a posthumous collection of Saintsbury entitled *A Last Vintage*:

> Perhaps the best thing in it [Saintsbury writes] comes from the mouth of the unblushingly illiterate and good-for-nothing abbot when he says, 'With immense labour learning is obtained: and then you have to die', which is better still in its native Latin, 'Immensis laboribus comparatur eruditio: ac post moriendum est'; and which, if not original, remains consummate and unanswerable.

"Consummate and unanswerable" (a phrase worth whispering to yourself three times slowly) has an autobiographical heartfeltishness: Saintsbury, more than most hard-reading garreteers, labored to accumulate and keep in good repair a productive enormity of book-memory. He consumed a French novel every morning before breakfast, but that was just warming up. All day his bookmarks were near at hand, finding pages to mark, and after dinner he was at it still, reading on, and writing with learnedly brimming charm and chattiness about what he read; with the result that there are few French, English, Greek, or Latin writ-

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ers of more than antiquarian interest in whom he hasn't found some trait, or tag, or particularity, worth praising. He is the greatest praiser in the history of criticism—each thing he reads provokes him to written acknowledgment in the form of a review-essay thank-you note, and every encountered writer feeds his genial style without misdirecting or overburdening it.

Lots of passages from George Saintsbury have gone into my copy-books, and a fair amount of William James, too; some Olivia Manning, some Iris Murdoch, some Dryden, some Updike, some Philip Sidney. Here's a sample Olivia Manning passage, from *The Great Fortune*:

> They had been served with a rich goose-liver paté, dark with truffles and dressed with clarified butter. Inchcape swallowed this down in chunks, talking through it as though it were a flavourless impediment to self-expression.

Here's another Manning extract, from *The Spoilt City*:

> Yakimov, discomforted by a sense of lost advantage, stared into his empty glass for some moments before it occurred to him that he had in his possession the means of re-establishing interest in himself. He drew from his hip pocket the plan he had found in Guy's desk. "Got something here," he said. "Give you an idea . . . not supposed to flash it about, but between old friends."
>
> He handed the paper to Freddi, who took it smiling, looked at it and ceased to smile.

In copying these over (in 1985) I was forced to take stock of every hyphen, every observational glance. I became Olivia Manning's flunky, her amanuensis, her temp-worker, in effect saying to her, for however long it took to thread her words on the page, *Where you go, I follow.* Such labor is usefully humbling, because it delivers you back into the third grade, when you copied things off the board and had to pay attention to the little boat shape in the last stroke of the cursive capital *B*, but it isn't mechanical or fancy-cramping because the transcriber's mind can think its own pin-striped thoughts on the sly, between times.

And, just as helpfully, every appealing high point that you read with transient delight can become, through commonplacing, merely average: it is no longer the jewel it was when you pried it from the dried salt marsh of its page, but has now itself been reduced to the primordial matter out of which only your own writing can lift and deliver you—you become, even textually, Sir Thomas Browne's Amphibian, "compelled to live in divided and distinguished worlds"—between the belly-squirming world of sedulous apprenticeship, and the nakedly leaping bipedal world of self-expression. Thus Bach copied out Buxtehude's and Vivaldi's music to learn its secrets, staying up late in his brother's latticed music library even though forbidden to do so; thus Wallace Stevens copied out in his commonplace book (titled *Sur Plusieurs Beaux Sujects*) what D. J. Bach had to say about Schoenberg; thus E. M. Forster in middle age copied out Tennyson and Macaulay; and thus Gibbon copied over Pascal, and Giannone's *History of Naples*:

> This various reading, which I now conducted with discretion, was digested, according to the precept and model of Mr. Locke, into a large commonplace-book; a practice, however, which I do not strenuously recommend. The action of the pen will doubtless imprint an idea on the mind as well as the paper; but I much question whether the benefits of this laborious method are adequate to the waste of time; and I must agree with Dr. Johnson (Idler, No. 74), "that what is twice read is commonly better remembered than what is transcribed."

Here Gibbon isn't fair to the efficacy of his self-tutelage. I wonder whether he could have formed his style—that unique window display of teacups and sarcophagi—without having felt his way, word by word, at the artificially impeded speed of handwriting, through some of the poetry of Gray and Pope, for instance. Probably he remembered Johnson's "Idler" essay because he had once been moved to commonplace it himself.

"To commonplace"—is it really a legal verb? Samuel Johnson believed it was:

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> Commonplace-book
>
> A book in which things to be remembered are ranged under general heads.
>
> I turned to my *commonplace-book* and found his case under the word *coquette*. *Tatler*
>
> To Commonplace
>
> To reduce to general heads.
>
> I do not apprehend any difficulty in collecting and *commonplacing* an universal history from the whole body of historians. *Felton*

"Felton" turns out to be one Henry Felton, D.D., who in *A Dissertation on Reading the Classics* (1710) wasn't sure that the activity of reducing to general heads was always beneficial:

> *Common-Placing* the *Sense* of an Author, is such a stupid Undertaking, that, if I may be indulged in saying it, they *want common Sense* that practise it. What Heaps of this Rubbish have I seen! O the Pains and Labour to record what other People have said, that is taken by those, who have nothing to say themselves! . . . When I see a beautiful Building of exact Order and Proportion, taken down, and the different Materials laid together by themselves, it putteth me in mind of these *Common-Place Men*.

Felton may be right—you don't want to take it too far. Charles Reade, the nineteenth-century novelist, had so many commonplace books that "they completely filled one of the rooms in his house," according to Richard Le Gallienne. He devoted one full day out of each week "cataloguing the notes of his multifarious reading." Still, it worked for him. The big risk, if you accumulate a lot of chirographic bits and pieces, is that you will be tempted to quote more of them than you should. In a review of a book called *The Progress of the Intellect*, George Eliot criticizes the author (Robert William Mackay) for writing pages that "read like extracts from his common-place book, which must be, as Southey said of his own, an urn under the arm of a river-god, rather than like a digested result of study, intended to inform the general reader." Don't feel you must recirculate everything that you have found (so I tell myself); a recopied passage will urn its keep even if you never quote it anywhere.

There is good to be gained in signing someone else's mind-signature, in scribbling in tongues: the retracing of a series of long-lost authorial motions with your own present pen, if you do it in the proper spirit, out of a desire to stay delight's presence rather than out of autodidactic obligation, or even if you begin reluctantly, dutifully, troubled by feelings of self-pelf in the face of so many pressing university-press editions, can calm and steady your state, not to mention improve it, for while the transcribing may appear to be a form of close and exclusive concentration, it has an equally important element of peaceable meditative mindlessness as well, like playing with a paper clip. Reading is fast, but handwriting is slow—it retards thought's due process, it consumes irreplaceable scupperfuls of time, it pushes every competing utterance away—and that is its great virtue, in fact, over mere underlining, and even over an efficient laptop retyping of the passage: for in those secret interclausal tracts of cleared thought-space, in those extended dreaming blanks of fair-copying between the instant it took the eye to comprehend a writer's phrase and the seeming eternity it then takes the hedgehog hand to negotiate that phrase again in legible, physical loops on the notebook page (especially on the verso side of the page, when the spiral binding interferes annoyingly with the muscle of the little finger), during which all of your purplest hopes are compelled to idle, and you must pay attention to some common rhetorical turn that you had never until then deigned to think about, at the same time your constrained prose-aptitude is stimulated to higher rates of metabolism by what Johnson called "the contagion of diligence" and through its temporary forced conformity with another person's exhaust-system of expression—in this state of rubber-burning, clutch-smoking subservience, new quiet racemes will emerge from among the paving stones and foam greenly up in places they would never otherwise have prospered.

Just don't do it too much—and always use quotation marks.

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The man who wishes to achieve the longed-for victory in a race must as a boy have trained long and hard, have sweated and groaned, and abstained from wine and women.

—CICERO, Ars Poetica, *412 A.D.*

The one nice thing about sports is that they prove men do have emotions and are not afraid to show them.

—JANE O'REILLY,
The Girl I Left Behind, *1980*

The Dodgers clinching the pennant in 1941 filled me with the kind of elation that one allegedly gets just before an epileptic fit: little did I know that I would have to live for such moments for the next fifteen years. For Dodger fans, the pennant race was inevitably the spree and the World Series (or playoff) was the hangover.

—WILFRED SHEED,
My Life as a Fan, *1993*

Johnson, I believe, did not play at draughts after leaving College, by which he suffered; for it would have afforded him an innocent soothing relief from the melancholy which distressed him so often. I have heard him regret that he had not learnt to play at cards; and the game of draughts we know is particularly calculated to fix the attention without straining it. There is a composure and gravity in draughts which insensibly tranquillises the mind.

—JAMES BOSWELL,
The Life of Johnson, *1791*

Devil an usher could make devil a customer sit down. The referee, encouraged by a number of big men in mufti, probably detectives, who had entered the ring, got as far as the ropes, climbed through them to the ring apron, and stood there like a fellow who has never gone off a diving board and wishes he hadn't walked out to the end. He was as pale as the inside of a Gouda cheese.

—A. J. LIEBLING, "Donnybrook Fair," *1955*

COMMONPLACE BOOK

Sports and Games

COLLECTED BY
ANDRÉ BERNARD

I have spent these several days past among my papers with the most pleasing tranquillity imaginable. You will ask how that can possibly be in the midst of Rome? Why, the Circensian Games were taking place; a kind of entertainment for which I have not the least taste. They have no novelty, no variety, nothing, in short, one would wish to see twice. I am the more astonished that so many thousands of grown men should be possessed again and again with a childish passion to look at galloping horses, and men standing upright in their chariots. If, indeed, they were attracted by the swiftness of the horses or the skill of the men, one could account for this enthusiasm. But in fact it is a bit of cloth they favor, a bit of cloth that captivates them. And if during the running the racers were to exchange colors, their partisans would change sides, and instantly forsake the very drivers and horses whom they were just before recognizing from afar, and clamorously saluting by name.

—PLINY THE YOUNGER,
Epistles IX, vi, *c. 100 A.D.*

Football has ceased to be a game or sport, and has become a contest . . . [that] has acquired public importance. Thousands of people care deeply about its outcome, as though it were one of Cressy's *Decisive Battles of the World.* The "pop-gun" (to borrow William James's words) has become "the crack of doom." All this grave concern, this passionate partisanship, this exultation and despair, is focused on a dozen boys just out of their teens. But it is doubtful if the effect on them is as bad as the effect produced in their elders. In any case their role is the more heroic.

—Harvard Alumni Bulletin,
November 5, 1925

Trico fishing is never easy, because the flies are so small, size 22, and they're hard to see, especially if one uses a truly imitative pattern. I ended up using a small Adams, which says "bug" to the trout in a general but friendly and duplicitous way. I was swept by the perfec-

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tion of things, by the glorious shape of each trout, by the angelic miniature perfection of mayflies, and by the pure wild silk of the Big Hole River. It is for such things that we were placed on this careening mudball.

—THOMAS MCGUANE,
An Outside Chance, *1990*

Commodus used to contend as a gladiator; in doing this at home he managed to kill a man now and then, and in making close passes with others, as if trying to clip off a bit of their hair, he sliced off the noses of some, the ears of others, and sundry features of still others. . . . In the midst of the struggle he became weary, and taking from a woman some chilled sweet wine in a cup shaped like a club, he drank it at one gulp. At this, both the populace and we senators immediately shouted out the words so familiar at drinking-bouts, "Long life to you!"

—DIO CASSIUS, LXIII
Roman History, Epitome, 17-18, *c. 230 A.D.*

The Friday afternoon session always closed with a "spelling down." Being in disgrace, I necessarily started out at the foot of my division of spellers, but I always slaughtered both divisions and stood alone with the medal around my neck when the campaign was finished. I *did* miss on a word once, just at the end of one of these conflicts, and so lost the medal. I left the first *r* out of February—but that was to accommodate a sweetheart. My passion was so strong just at that time that I would have left out the whole alphabet if the word had contained it.

—The Autobiography of Mark Twain,
(d. 1910), published 1924

Today the *Times* reported the arrival of the first pitchers and catchers at the spring training camps, and the morning was abruptly brightened, as if by the delivery of a seed catalogue. The view from my city window still yields only frozen tundras of trash, but now spring is guaranteed and one of my favorite urban flowers, the baseball box score, will burgeon and flourish through the warm, languid, information-packed weeks and months just ahead.

—ROGER ANGELL,
The Summer Game, *1972*

An athlete cannot bring true courage to his fights unless he has sometimes been beaten black and blue. The fighter who has seen his own blood, whose teeth have been rattled by a blow from his opponent, who has been thrown to the ground and felt the whole weight of his rival's body on him, who has not lost his spirit even when hurled about the ring, who, every time he has been knocked down, has got to his feet again more pugnacious than ever, this is the man who faces his next fight with confidence.

—SENECA, Moral Letters XIII, 2, *c. 62 A.D.*

Sprains and injuries caused by a blow they treat with the dung of wild boars, collected in the spring and dried. The same remedy is applied to charioteers who have been dragged or injured by a wheel, or severely bruised in any other way; in an emergency it can be used fresh. Some think that it is more efficacious if it is boiled in vinegar. They say too that powdered and taken with a drink it is a good cure for fractures and strained muscles, while for those injured in a crash it is better taken in vinegar. More cautious doctors burn it to ash and mix it with water; the Emperor Nero is said to have refreshed himself regularly with this cordial, trying even by this method to prove himself a real charioteer.

—PLINY THE ELDER,
Natural History XXVIII, *237 A.D.*

In a way it is the fate of a warrior class to receive rewards, plaudits, and exhilaration simultaneously with the means of self-destruction. When a middle-aged lawyer moves more slowly on the tennis court, he makes adjustments and may even laugh at his geriatric restrictions because for him there remains the law. For the athlete who reaches thirty-five, something in him dies; not a peripheral activity but a fundamental passion. It necessarily dies. The athlete rarely recuperates. He approaches the end of his playing days the way old people approach death. He puts his finances in order. He reminisces easily. He offers advice to the young. But, the athlete differs from an old person in that he must continue living. Behind all the years of practice and all the hours of glory waits that inexorable terror of living without the game.

—BILL BRADLEY, Life on the Run, *1976*

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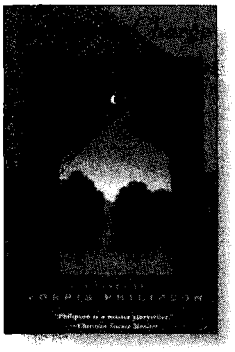
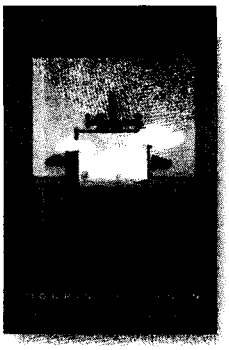

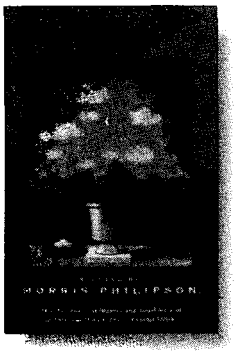

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**Christian Science Monitor*

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The Last Island of the Savages

ADAM GOODHEART

The lumps of white coral shone round the dark mound like a chaplet of bleached skulls, and everything around was so quiet that when I stood still all sound and all movement in the world seemed to come to an end.

It was a great peace, as if the earth had been one grave, and for a time I stood there thinking mostly of the living who, buried in remote places out of the knowledge of mankind, still are fated to share in its tragic or grotesque miseries. In its noble struggles too—who knows? The human heart is vast enough to contain all the world. It is valiant enough to bear the burden, but where is the courage that would cast it off?

—Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*

Shortly before midnight on August 2, 1981, a Panamanian-registered freighter called the *Primrose*, which was traveling in heavy seas between Bangladesh and Australia with a cargo of poultry feed, ran aground on a coral reef in the Bay of Bengal. As dawn broke the next morning, the captain was probably relieved to see dry land just a few hundred yards from the *Primrose*'s resting place: a low-lying island, several miles across, with a narrow beach of clean white sand giving way to dense jungle. If he consulted his charts, he realized that this was North Sentinel Island, a western outlier in the Andaman archipelago, which belongs to India and stretches in a ragged line between Burma and Sumatra. But the sea was too rough to lower the lifeboats, and so—since the ship seemed to be in no danger of sinking—the captain decided to keep his crew on board and wait for help to arrive.

A few days later, a young sailor on lookout duty in the Primrose's watch-

Adam Goodheart, a member of the SCHOLAR's editorial board, lives in Washington, D.C. He was a founding editor of *Civilization* magazine, and his essays have appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *New York Times*, *Outside*, and other publications.

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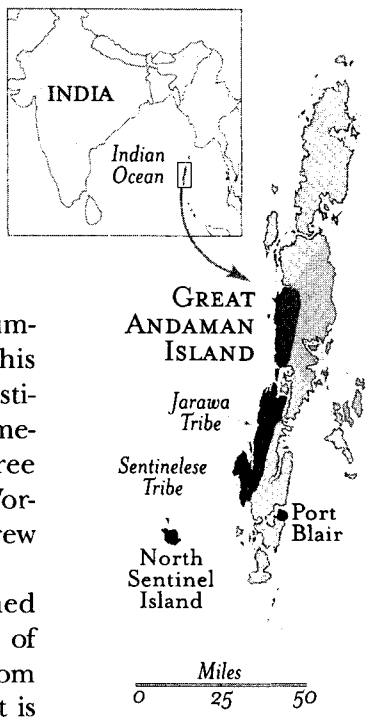
tower spotted several people coming down from the forest toward the beach and peering out at the stranded vessel. They must be a rescue party sent by the shipping company, he thought. Then he took a closer look at them. They were small men, well-built, frizzy-haired, and black. They were naked except for narrow belts that circled their waists. And they were holding spears, bows, and arrows, which they had begun waving in a manner that seemed not altogether friendly.



Not long after this, a wireless operator at the Regent Shipping Company's offices in Hong Kong received an urgent distress call from the *Primrose*'s captain, asking for an immediate airdrop of firearms so that his crew could defend itself. "Wild men, estimate more than 50, carrying various homemade weapons are making two or three wooden boats," the message read. "Worrying they will board us at sunset. All crew members' lives not guaranteed."

If the *Primrose*'s predicament seemed a thing less of the twentieth century than of the eighteenth—an episode, perhaps, from Captain Cook's voyages in the Pacific—it is because the island where the ship lay grounded had somehow managed to slip through the net of history. Although its existence had been known for centuries, its inhabitants had had virtually no contact with the rest of humanity. Anthropologists referred to them as "Sentinelese," but no one knew what they called themselves—indeed, no one even knew what language they spoke. And in any case, no one within living memory had gotten close enough to ask. Whether the natives' prelapsarian state was one of savagery or innocence, no one knew either.

The same monsoon-whipped waves that had driven the *Primrose* onto the reef kept the tribesmen's canoes at bay, and high winds blew their arrows off the mark. The crew kept up a twenty-four-hour guard with makeshift weapons—a flare gun, axes, some lengths of pipe—as news of the emergency slowly filtered to the outside world. (An Indian government spokesman denied reports in the Hong Kong press that the Sentinelese were "cannibals." A Hong Kong government spokesman suggested that perhaps the *Primrose*'s radio officer had "gone bananas.") After nearly a week, the Indian Navy dispatched a tugboat and a helicopter to rescue the besieged sailors.

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The natives of North Sentinel must have watched the whirring aircraft as it hovered three times above the great steel hulk, lowering a rope ladder to pluck the men safely back into modernity. Then the strange machines departed, the sea calmed, and the island remained, lush and impenetrable, still waiting for its Cook or its Columbus.

Epochs of history rarely come to a sudden end, seldom announce their passing with anything so dramatic as the death of a king or the dismantling of a wall. More often, they withdraw slowly and imperceptibly (or at least unperceived), like the ebbing tide on a deserted beach.

That is how the Age of Discovery ended. For more than five hundred years, the envoys of civilization sailed through storms and hacked through jungles, startling in turn one tribe after another of long-lost human cousins. For an instant, before the inevitable breaking of faith, the two groups would face each other, staring—as innocent, both of them, as children, and blameless as if the world had been born afresh. To live such a moment seems, when we think of it now, to have been one of the most profound experiences that our planet in its vanished immensity once offered. But each time the moment repeated itself on each fresh beach, there was one less island to be found, one less chance to start everything anew. It began to repeat itself less and less often, until there came a time, maybe a century ago, when there were only a few such places left, only a few doors still unopened.

Sometime quite recently, the last door opened. I believe it happened not long before the end of the millennium, on an island already all but known, a place encircled by the buzzing, thrumming web of a world still unknown to it, and by the mesh of a history that had forever been drawing closer.

North Sentinel Island is not located in one of those parts of the world that are famous for having been "discovered"—the Caribbean, say, or the South Pacific. The Andaman Islands, though rarely visited until the nineteenth century, have been known to Western civilization for much longer. Here are some things that have happened in the course of the last thousand years or so:

In 1296 or thereabouts, Marco Polo described Andamanese generally as "a most brutish and savage race, having heads, eyes, and teeth like those of dogs. They are very cruel, and kill and eat every foreigner whom they can lay their hands upon." Historians believe that he based this on hearsay, and did not visit the islands.

One night in 1771, an East India Company hydrographic survey vessel, the *Diligent*, passed by North Sentinel and sighted "a multitude of lights . . . upon the shore." This is the first recorded mention of the island. The surveying party did not stop to investigate, however. In those days, bonfires still beckoned from hundreds of coasts, all over the world. The ship sailed on.

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In 1867, toward the end of the summer monsoon season, an Indian merchantman, the *Nineveh*, was wrecked on the reef off North Sentinel. Eighty-six passengers and twenty crewmen got safely to the beach in the ship's boat. On the morning of the third day, as these survivors sat down to a makeshift breakfast, they were suddenly attacked. "The savages were perfectly naked, with short hair and red painted noses, and were opening their mouth and making sounds like *pa on ough*; their arrows appeared to be tipped with iron," the *Nineveh*'s captain later reported. (The Sentinelese had probably scavenged the metal from flotsam on the beach, as they apparently still do today.) He had fled at the first shower of arrows and escaped in the ship's boat, to be picked up several days later by a brig bound for Moulmein. The Andaman Islands were now officially part of the British Empire—they'd been settled as a penal colony—so a Royal Navy rescue party was dispatched by steamer to the site of the wreck. It arrived to find that the *Nineveh*'s passengers had managed to fend off their attackers with sticks and stones, and the savages had not been seen since.

In 1896, a Hindu convict escaped on a makeshift raft from the main penal settlement on Great Andaman Island. He drifted across thirty miles or so of open ocean and landed on the beach of North Sentinel. A search party found his body there some days later, pierced in several places by arrows and with its throat cut. No natives were sighted. After this, the island was left alone for nearly a century.

In the spring of 1974, North Sentinel was visited by a film crew that was shooting a documentary titled *Man in Search of Man,* along with a few anthropologists, some armed policemen, and a photographer for *National Geographic.* In the words of one of the scientists, their plan was to "win the natives' friendship by friendly gestures and plenty of gifts." As the team's motorized dinghy made its way through the reefs toward shore, some natives emerged from the woods. The anthropologists made friendly gestures. The Sentinelese responded with a hail of arrows. The dinghy proceeded to a landing-spot out of arrow range, where the policemen, dressed in padded armor, disembarked and laid gifts on the sand: a miniature plastic automobile, some coconuts, a tethered live pig, a child's doll, and some aluminum cookware. Then they returned to the dinghy and waited to observe the natives' reaction to the gifts. The natives' reaction was to fire more arrows, one of which hit the film director in the left thigh. The man who had shot the film director was observed laughing proudly and walking toward the shade of a tree, where he sat down. Other natives were observed spearing the pig and the doll and burying them in the sand. They did, however, take the cookware and the coconuts with evident delight.

In 1975, the exiled king of Belgium, on a tour of the Andamans, was brought by local dignitaries for an overnight cruise to the waters off

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North Sentinel. Mindful of lessons learned the year before, they kept the royal party out of arrow range, approaching just close enough for a Sentinelese warrior to aim his bow menacingly at the king, who expressed his profound satisfaction with the adventure.

By this time, quite a bit more was known about the Andamanese aborigines than in the days of Marco Polo. Those incomparable observers and cataloguers of humanity, the British, had enjoyed nearly a century of unchallenged dominion over the archipelago, and had taken full advantage of the opportunities this offered to observe and catalogue its inhabitants (with the notable exception of the reclusive Sentinelese). On the whole, they were not impressed by what they saw.

Unlike the mainland Indians, the black-skinned Andamanese were of Negrito stock, and they lived as hunter-gatherers, subsisting mainly on fruits, tubers, fish, crabs, honey, wild pigs, and the eggs of turtles and seagulls. They were so small as to be almost pygmies: adult males often measured several inches under five feet. The islanders wore no clothing, and few ornaments; neither sex troubled to cover its genitals. (Indeed, Andamanese men often waggled their penises at visitors by way of friendly greeting.) Though not cannibals, they might easily be mistaken as such, for they wore the jawbones of deceased relatives around their necks. Most astonishingly, they had never learned to make fire, counting instead on the occasional lightning strike and then preserving embers carefully in hollowed-out trees. In short, concluded the first official report to Her Majesty's government, "it is impossible to imagine any human beings lower on the scale of civilisation than are the Andaman savages."

As unimpressive as the Andaman savages may have been to the hard-headed colonial administrators, they provided first-class material for the burgeoning field of anthropology. During the first half-century after the British arrived in 1858, a continuous stream of books, reports, and scholarly articles appeared, often accompanied by handsome photographic plates: silvery rotogravures in which naked tribesmen fished, danced, or brooded picturesquely over pagan talismans. The interesting hypothesis was advanced that they might be the remnant of a primitive race, one that, some time in the distant past, had inhabited all of southern Asia. Yet suddenly, unaccountably, not long after the turn of the century, the scholarship stopped. The Andamanese, it seems, were no longer considered a fruitful subject of research.

I came across North Sentinel Island late one night on the other side of the world. Browsing through an online database, I found it mentioned in an article in a small scholarly journal, with an almost offhand reference describing it as the scene of what was probably the last "first friendly encounter" in history. Only in 1991, the author reported, had an Indian

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government anthropologist, after more than twenty years of unsuccessful attempts, finally managed to interact face to face with the Sentinelese. Intrigued, I searched the Web some more, and found almost nothing: a few sketchy wire-service reports about the grounding of the *Primrose*, and the home page of an evangelical organization in California that listed the inhabitants of North Sentinel (along with Buddhists, Jews, and "Gays in San Francisco") in its database of 1,573 "unreached peoples."

I remember how unreal the place seemed, that night in my fluorescent-lit office, as I surfed on the oceans of information, the island emerging and then submerging again. I think I already knew that I would try to go there.

The anthropologist who had made the first contact, the scholarly journal said, was a man named T. N. Pandit. As I did more research, I discovered that he had also published the only book ever written about North Sentinel: a slim volume, from a small press in Calcutta, titled *The Sentinelese*. I telephoned Pandit in New Delhi, where he now lives in retirement, and he told me a bit about his work in the Andaman Islands.

In 1966, when Pandit first embarked by steamer for the archipelago, his idea of what awaited him was based on the decades-old images of noble savages. Though he had paid no special attention to the Andamanese during his university studies—he had focused instead on the mountain tribes of his native Kashmir—Pandit had read one or two of the classic texts. And when, after applying successfully for a government job with the Anthropological Survey of India, he was posted to the islands, he thought he knew what to expect.

He found something quite different. In the main bazaar of Port Blair, the Indian administrative capital on Great Andaman Island, a little dark-skinned old lady begged for alms outside a tea shop. Other half-caste Andamanese lived as squatters on the waterfront, in abandoned bunkers built during the wartime Japanese occupation. Except for these survivors—some two dozen in all—the ten tribes that British scholars had so lovingly documented were now no more than a litany of names: Aka-Bea, Akar-Bale, A-Pucikwar, Aka-Kol, Aka-Kede, Oko-Juwoi, Aka-Jeru, Aka-Kora, Aka-Cari, Aka-Bo. Only one tribe on Great Andaman, the Jarawa, had managed to escape this fate—by withdrawing into the remotest parts of the jungle and dealing ruthlessly with anyone who trespassed.

After he had been in the Andamans for a few months, however, Pandit began to hear vague reports of another native tribe, one he had not seen mentioned in any of the anthropological literature. By some accounts these people were small, dark, and smooth-skinned, like the rest of the Andamanese, while by others they were, tall, fair, and bearded—descendants, perhaps, of escaped convicts from penal-settlement times. Everyone agreed that they were ferocious warriors. Strangest of all was that the island they inhabited, this unexplored place of myth and legend, was just a few hours by boat from Port Blair.

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There seems to be no simple explanation of why North Sentinel Island was permitted to remain so isolated for so long. For one thing, though, it is too small and inconveniently located to offer much enticement for colonization—lying, as it does, away from the main settlements on the east side of Great Andaman, opposite that island's wild and storm-lashed western coast. It has no natural harbors, and its surrounding abatis of uncharted coral reefs keeps out all but the most persistent or foolhardy seafarers. (Those reefs also keep in the natives' unseaworthy dugout canoes, which they use only in the placid water of the lagoon.) The place never had much appeal, in other words, until it came into its own as a historical curiosity—the last place in the world where all the tragedy and farce of the Age of Discovery could still be played out, if on a miniature scale.

It was not Pandit's idea to try to go there. He is not, by temperament, an explorer. (He has traveled outside India only once in his life, to attend an academic conference in Germany.) I did not understand this before I met him, and the stories I had heard of his experiences in the Andamans had led me to imagine a bearded, barrel-chested man, swathed in khaki and bravado. This is what I expected to find when we finally met in New Delhi. Instead, Pandit is small and slope-shouldered, with a wispy mustache and gentle brown eyes. We sat in my hotel room and, over endless cups of milky tea, he told me more about his adventures.

One day, after Pandit had been in the Andamans for less than a year, the governor of the islands summoned him for a meeting and announced that he was planning a large-scale expedition to North Sentinel, complete with armed police, naval personnel, and two large patrol boats equipped with inflatable rubber dinghies for navigating through the reefs. "There was a feeling that we were trying to establish friendly contact, which would be considered an achievement at the government level," Pandit told me. He was offered the honor of being the first anthropologist ever to land on the island.

If friendly contact was its objective, the expedition failed. As the explorers approached North Sentinel, they could see through their binoculars several clusters of people, both adults and children, standing on the shore. But as they drew nearer, the natives disappeared into the forest. At last, after half a mile or so, Pandit and his companions reached a clearing. There they found a group of huts, small lean-to shelters made of branches and leaves. There were fires still burning outside each one. The huts were empty.

Pandit remembers that the contact party left gifts in the empty huts: plastic buckets, bolts of cloth, packaged candy. He remembers the festive air of the occasion—half military mission and half school picnic—and how, despite his protests, the policemen and naval officers took as souvenirs some of the household goods the Sentinelese had left behind: bows, arrows, a basket, the painted skull of a wild boar. His strongest

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memory, he told me, is of the way the sunlight fell on the huts as he first emerged into the clearing from the shade of the jungle, filtering down onto roofs of leafy branches.

When I listen now to the tapes I made of my interviews with Pandit, I hear civilization's din in the background, a perimeter of sounds enclosing us: the bleating horns of auto-rickshaws and the cries of chai-wallahs from the alleyway behind the hotel; the comings and goings of tea trays and the soft automatic cough of the air conditioner switching on.

This is how you get to the most isolated human settlement on earth: You board an evening flight at JFK for Heathrow, Air India 112, a plane full of elegant sari-clad women, London-bound businessmen, hippie backpackers. You settle in to watch a movie (a romantic comedy in which Harrison Ford and Anne Heche get stranded on a desert island) and after a quick nap you are in London.

Then you catch another plane. You read yesterday's *Times* while flying above the corrugated gullies of eastern Turkey, watch a Hindi musical somewhere over Iran. That night, and for the week that follows, you are in New Delhi, where the smog lies on the ground like mustard gas, and where one day you see an elephant—an elephant!—in the midst of downtown traffic.

From New Delhi you go by train to Calcutta, where you must wait for a ship. And you must wait for a ticket. There are endless lines at the shipping company office, and jostling, and passing back and forth of black-and-white photographs in triplicate and hundred-rupee notes and stacks of documents interleaved with Sapphire brand carbon paper. Next you are on the ship, a big Polish-built steamer crawling with cockroaches. The steamer passes all manner of scenery: slim and fragile riverboats like craft from a pharaoh's tomb; broad-beamed, lateen-rigged Homeric merchantmen. You watch the sun set into the Bay of Bengal, play cards with some Swedish backpackers, and take in the shipboard video programming, which consists of the complete works of Macaulay Culkin, subtitled in Arabic. On the morning of the sixth day your ship sails into a wide, sheltered bay—steaming jungles off the port bow, a taxi-crowded jetty to starboard—and you have arrived in the Andamans, at Port Blair.

In Port Blair you board a bus, finding a seat beneath a wall-mounted loudspeaker blaring a Hindi cover of "The Macarena Song." The bus rumbles through the bustling market town, past barefoot men peddling betel nut, past a billboard for the local computer-training school ("I want to become the 21st century's computer professional"). On the western outskirts you see a sawmill that is turning the Andaman forests into pencils on behalf of a company in Madras, and you see the airport, where workmen are busy extending the runway—out into a field where water buffalo graze—so that in a few years, big jetliners will be able to land here, bringing tour groups direct from Bangkok and Singapore. A little farther

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on, you pass rice paddies, and patches of jungle, and the Water Sports Training Centre, and thatched huts, and family-planning posters, and satellite dishes craning skyward.

And then, within an hour's time, you are at the ocean again, and on a very clear day you will see the island in the distance, a slight disturbance of the horizon.

Although T. N. Pandit did not know it, someone else had already set foot on North Sentinel and encountered a few of its inhabitants—even though the contact was not what anyone would describe as "friendly." This previous explorer was, in fact, a man curiously similar to himself: a young government administrator, recently arrived at Port Blair from the mainland, who had taken it as his mission to improve the lot of the surviving aborigines.

Born in Surrey, Maurice Vidal Portman was just nineteen—two years younger than the British settlement itself—when, in 1879, he was given the impressive-sounding position of Officer in Charge of the Andamanese. It is unclear whether he was so favored because of family connections (his grandfather was a viscount) or because, as must already have been evident, Portman was exceptional among colonials for his curiosity about the natives and their customs. In any case, he had been in the Andamans only a few months when he organized an expedition to North Sentinel, hoping to learn about a tribe already renowned for its reclusiveness. Portman landed on the island at the head of a large party of armed men, including officers, convict orderlies, and trackers recruited from the Andamanese tribes that the British had already befriended.

The explorers tramped through the jungle, systematically crisscrossing the small island in search of the natives. They found a network of pathways, and several small villages that looked to have been freshly abandoned, and the skeleton of an aborigine hidden between the buttress roots of a large tree. Portman was impressed by the island's fertile soil and its stately groves of tropical hardwoods. But he did not encounter a single living soul. The Sentinelese simply melted into the forest when they heard the Europeans approach. Finally, after several days, Portman and his men managed to flush out a few stragglers: an elderly couple and some children. In the interest of science, the adults and four of the children were brought aboard the exploring party's schooner and taken back to Port Blair for observation. Unfortunately, Portman later wrote, all the captured Sentinelese "sickened rapidly, and the old man and his wife died, so the four children were sent back to their home with quantities of presents." They had remained in British hands long enough, however, for Portman to note their "peculiarly idiotic expression of countenance, and manner of behaving."

In later years, Portman gained moderate renown for his anthropo-

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logical and antiquarian researches, and for having, as his obituary in the *Times* of London put it, "above all other men . . . the 'native touch,' that rare and mysterious gift that attracts and makes friends at once with natives." Over the course of his long association with the aborigines of Great Andaman, he grew quite fond of them, and came to believe, as he wrote, that "in many ways they closely resemble the average lower class English country schoolboy."

Once, on a visit to London, Portman addressed a meeting of the Royal Geographical Society, where he described his various adventures among the Andamanese. He concluded his speech by saying: "Their association with outsiders has brought them nothing but harm, and it is a matter of great regret to me that such a pleasant race are so rapidly becoming extinct. We could better spare many another."

There are three small openings in the ring of coral that surrounds North Sentinel Island. Most of the year, even these are effectively closed, since during the monsoon season—which lasts from April or May through November—the surf runs so high that any boat shallow-drafted enough to pass through would almost certainly be dashed to pieces.

From December to April, however, an unbroken spell of perfect weather settles over the Andamans. The air is warm, the skies are high and cloudless, and the sea, as travel books say, is gin-clear, reflecting immaculate beaches shaded by coconut palms. This is when the foreign backpackers converge on the islands—young Europeans, mostly, clutching their Lonely Planet guides, seeking a few weeks of sweet oblivion in beachside hostels well supplied with cheap hashish and expensive beer. This is also the period when North Sentinel Island is exposed to incursions by sea. A large boat can anchor safely within a mile of shore, and then a small motor launch, guided by a skillful pilot who knows the territory, can—usually—make its way through the gaps in the reef to the beach.

During the 1970s and 1980s, T. N. Pandit made many such trips to the island. At first, the visits were sporadic, inspired by the whim of some local official or visiting dignitary who wanted to brave the arrows of the aboriginal warriors. Pandit came along as an expert adviser on such missions, not as their instigator. He had his hands full dealing with the aborigines of Great Andaman—figuring out how to handle the still-hostile Jarawa, and trying to aid the disease-ridden, opium-addicted relicts of the "friendly" tribes. Also, he couldn't help wondering whether the Sentinelese, if successfully befriended, might not meet a similar fate. But sometime after 1975—when *National Geographic* published, under the headline "The Last Andaman Islanders," dramatic photographs of the expedition on which the film director was wounded—trips to North Sentinel began occurring more frequently. This was partly because of the island's increasing renown. If the chief commissioner of the Andamans

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made an exciting excursion to North Sentinel, before long the deputy commissioner would want to go as well, and so would the inspector-general of police. Since such officials, in the Indian bureaucratic system, are generally sent out from the mainland on a two- or three-year hardship posting to Port Blair, there was a steady supply of new dignitaries clamoring to go. (Occasionally, foreign scholars have applied for permission to visit the aborigines, but the Indian government is sensitive about the Andamans, and does not like outsiders nosing around. Jacques Cousteau once came to shoot a documentary on the islands, and was chased away. Claude Lévi-Strauss asked Indira Gandhi to let his students do fieldwork among the Andamanese, and she refused.)

Anyhow, wasn't it merely romantic fantasy to think that the Sentinelese could maintain their isolation forever? The population of the Andaman Islands was doubling every decade, as the Indian government encouraged emigrants from the overcrowded subcontinent—Bengalis, Tamils, Sikhs, Punjabis—to settle there, joining the descendants of convicts brought by the British. As a "Tribal Reserve Area," North Sentinel Island was off-limits to outsiders, under pain of a prison sentence; Indian Navy helicopters and ships made regular patrols to keep anyone from approaching. The longer it was kept isolated, however, the more attractive it became to local fishermen, who occasionally visited its outlying reefs with a wink from the navy. And then there was the problem that the Andaman archipelago was, and still is, a haven for outlaws. Its thousands of miles of uninhabited coastline provide hideouts for gold smugglers, gunrunners, pirates, and drug dealers plying the complicated underground trade routes of Southeast Asia. Illegal loggers come from Burma to cut valuable hardwoods; poachers come from Thailand for sharks, sea cucumbers, and rare shells. The outlaws have fast boats and heavy weaponry, and they brook no interference with their work.

So there were ample reasons for Andamanese officialdom to decide, as it did around 1980, that the Sentinelese must somehow be brought into its sheltering embrace. There was no need to repeat the mistakes of the past, not at this late date in history. The Indians were not the British; they had ample experience of the harm done by overzealous colonizers, and their hands were unstained by racial guilt. "Generations ago, we were all tribals," said one territorial governor. "Now nobody wants to go back. We got light, so let's spread it."

The Indian government had staked its definitive claim to North Sentinel in 1970, when an official surveying party landed at an isolated spot and erected—atop a disused native hearth—a stone tablet proclaiming the island part of the Republic of India. Since the Sentinelese were not, and to this day still are not, aware of the existence of either writing or India, it is unlikely that this monument has made much of an impression.

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Beginning in 1981, though, expeditions were dispatched to North Sentinel every month or two during fair weather, bearing gifts intended to propitiate the fractious aborigines. Pandit and his fellow team members were given use of the governor's own official yacht, the MV *Tarmugli.* They would leave Port Blair after nightfall, double the southern tip of Great Andaman, and anchor off the reef at North Sentinel about six hours later. The next morning, after breakfast, a contact party would set off toward shore in the *Tarmugli*'s motorized lifeboats.

On some visits the party would see Sentinelese; on others they would not. Invariably, however, they would try to land—at a place out of bowshot, if there were natives on the beach—and leave gifts. These included sacks of coconuts, bananas, and bits of iron conveniently sized to be hammered and scraped into arrowheads; occasionally they brought special presents like mirrors, red ribbons, rubber balls, and bead necklaces. Sometimes the Sentinelese would make gestures that appeared friendly, waving their hands as the dinghies chugged across the lagoon; sometimes they would make gestures that were probably hostile, turning their backs toward the visitors en masse and sitting on their haunches as if to defecate. It was not out of character for them to rush out of the jungle and grab the gifts, then shower their retreating benefactors with arrows.

Occasionally there were incidents more reminiscent of the Keystone Kops than of Captain Cook. Once, a high-ranking naval officer, newly deputed to the Andamans, accompanied the expedition. "He was a very fat guy, a Punjabi, with a very loud manner, and talking too much, that type of character," Pandit recalls. As the officer's dinghy approached shore, and Sentinelese were seen emerging from the forest, he stood up and started waving his arms over his head, shouting at the tribesmen in Punjabi: "Hello! Hello! I am your friend!" A second later, an arrow clanged against an iron shield that a crewman had held up, just in time, in front of the officer's belly. During another expedition, a boat carrying the superintendent of police turned turtle in the surf. Some armed Sentinelese watched from the beach, but did not shoot the struggling men. This was seen as an encouraging sign.

But still, by the early 1990s, after more than a decade of such attempts, the hoped-for breakthrough—the triumphant moment when the natives would "reach out and accept the hand of friendship," as local politicians liked to put it—had not occurred.

Elsewhere in the Andamans, Pandit and his colleagues had already gotten an intoxicating taste of what such an encounter might be like. In the early 1970s, they had used similar tactics to establish friendly relations with the Jarawa, the one tribe on Great Andaman that the British and their Indian successors had not subdued. This was a matter of greater urgency than the Sentinelese missions, since outsiders were rapidly encroaching upon the Jarawa tribal reserve. The Jarawa fought

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back by shooting arrows at hunters, loggers, policemen, and road workers who entered their jungle—and, unlike the Sentinelese, the Jarawa rarely missed. They crept into neighboring villages by night and shot people, livestock, family pets, even the elephants used for shifting felled timber. After several years of gift-dropping missions to the western coast of Great Andaman, however, the Jarawa began welcoming the contact parties onto the beach, swimming out to the dinghies unarmed and embracing the delighted anthropologists.

True, these same Jarawa continued to shoot villagers with undiminished enthusiasm whenever an opportunity arose. But every month or so, when the official gift-bearing parties arrived on their shore, it was like a joyous reunion. Video footage shows the jet black aborigines swarming over the visitors' boats—men, women, and children, all naked, grabbing coconuts and bolts of red cloth, grasping the visitors' hands, reaching out curiously to pinch their light skin. Later, by the water's edge, they danced and sang, their voices joining in a strange, oscillating trill: *alay, oday, otalay, laday, alay, laylay, yamolay, alay . . .*

The anthropologists could not understand the Jarawa language; they still cannot. But there were other ways to communicate. "They loved to play with us, young and old, men and women," Pandit says. "They thought nothing of climbing onto our shoulders, naked, to go for a ride down the beach. I remember once that I was running down the beach with two Jarawa girls, with a hand on each of them, on their shoulders, when one of them seized my hand and placed it over her breast as we ran. It did not seem sexual—just that it was perhaps a more convenient place for my hand to rest. You know, clothing and things like that are inconveniences of modern man." Indeed, before landing, the anthropologists would strip down to shorts or underpants so as not to frighten the aborigines. Sometimes several Jarawa would surround a helpless scientist and, laughing, tear his remaining clothes off.

There were a few untoward incidents over the years. Once or twice, some young policemen and sailors tried to take advantage of the Jarawa women's innocence; the Indian authorities did not invite them back. Several young male Jarawa, in turn, once came aboard the *Tarmugli* and attempted to take certain sexual liberties with a female journalist from Bombay. The woman had to be locked in her cabin until the frustrated aborigines departed. And the natives would seize as a "gift" anything that struck their fancy, including jewelry, watches, and such. Pandit lost several pairs of spectacles this way.

Still, he remembers those visits as among the happiest days of his life. "As an anthropologist, such an experience is a matter of professional interest," he told me, "but more than that, you are reacting as a human being, and as a member of the civilized world, so-called. It has been so exhilarating. One feels humble in so many ways in their presence."

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One night in my hotel in New Delhi, I saw a television commercial—it was on the BBC World Service—that shows the landing of Christopher Columbus. The Spanish ships glide, impossibly, right up to the beach; topsails and royal standards unfurl against the sky; the admiral strides through the surf and presses his forehead against the sand, transformed by his discovery, exalted. Then—"Excuse me, Mr. Columbus? I've got a package for you." The admiral looks up. It's a uniformed delivery man for one of the international express-mail companies, already waiting on the beach. The voice-over tells us that they'll deliver anything, anywhere in the world; there's nowhere they won't go.

It is not certain whether, outside the Andaman Islands, there still exists any community that has had as little contact with civilization as the Sentinelese. Pandit and his colleagues say there is none. Several American anthropologists I have spoken to agree with them. (But then, they had not previously heard of the Sentinelese, either.) The "Stone Age" tribes I read about in college, ten years ago, were—I now discover—already well acquainted with the outside world, and are now even more so. The Yanomamö ("the fierce people," as the subtitle of one of my textbooks described them) prostitute themselves to Brazilian gold miners, while the !Kung San are chased off game reserves to make way for ecotourism in the Kalahari Desert.

Even so, every few years there is a report of one "lost tribe" or another—usually in the Amazon rain forest or the highlands of New Guinea—staggering naked from the jungle into the dazzling glare of modernity. Such stories are almost invariably followed by a retraction: the tribesmen turn out to have T-shirts and cigarettes stashed back in their huts, and the original report turns out to have been a mistake or a fraud. (The most famous such incident was the so-called Tasaday hoax of 1971, involving a supposed Stone Age tribe in the Philippines; the tribesmen were Filipino farmers whom local politicians had coerced into posing as naked cavemen for the camera crews from CBS and National Geographic.)

At a cousin's wedding reception last summer, I happened to meet an anthropologist named Stuart Kirsch, who has researched the reality behind recent stories of first contact. As we sipped champagne, he explained to me that lost tribes are usually not so much lost as they are in hiding. The reason that relatively small areas of New Guinea and Brazil generate so many of the reports, he said, is that these regions are now crowded with peoples whom interlopers have driven farther and farther into the hinterlands, until they end up encircled. Their "lost" status is purely voluntary, a matter of prudent foreign policy.

One can understand, of course, why the old myths still exert their appeal. The notion of a lost tribe both flatters and consoles the discoverers; it transforms them, in the telling, from gauche trespassers into hon-

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ored guests. And some latitude has always been granted to the heroes of such tales: Did not even Columbus's discovery turn out to be fraught with qualifying footnotes? Were not Melville's noble Typees, by his own admission, already in hiding from the French colonizers of Polynesia?

Lost tribes, Kirsch has written, "are destroyed at the moment of their creation." That might explain why explorers have been so eager to create new ones, and why, now that the lost tribes of the earth are used up, we are moved to invent new ones beyond it. If there are no more dark places in this world, there may be, perhaps, dark places still in the universe, where others live, like us and unlike, twins separated at a distant birth to show us what we might have been.

At the entrance to the harbor of Port Blair sits a small island that, until the beginning of World War II, served as the local center of British administration. Ross Island was abandoned after the war, and the jungle has been allowed to reclaim it, with the notorious efficiency of tropical nature. Tall coconut palms sprout from the mossy tennis courts, and vines have seized the pretty Gothic steeple of the Anglican church, pulling it roughly back toward earth. Already, the place seems more like some ruined city of Olmec kings than like a settlement that thrived only a few decades ago. It is sweetly strange to think that in London veterans' hospitals or Yorkshire nursing homes, there probably live people who in their youth hit volleys on those courts, or traded pleasantries with the vicar of that church.

But the best place to get a sense of the Andaman Islands under British rule is not in the archipelago at all, but rather in New Delhi, in the main reading room of the National Archives of India. The reading room is a dreary place, lined with shelves of indexes to the annals of the British Raj, their covers warped and stained by a century's worth of monsoon humidity. Opening one of these volumes to the section on the Andaman District and skimming the list of topic headings is enough to give the flavor of late-nineteenth-century life there:

> Flogging to check unnatural crime in the Settlement of Port Blair.
>
> Mortality among the sheep sent from Calcutta.
>
> Branding of life prisoners.
>
> Sentence of death passed on Bealalo alias Philip, an Andamanese.
>
> Port Blair Superintendent applies for a large ice-machine.

In the early days of the Andaman penal settlement, no important decision could be made without consulting the imperial authorities back

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in Calcutta. (The seat of power, along with all its records, was shifted to New Delhi in 1912.) In the archives, therefore, still bound in their original dossiers of olive drab paper, are thousands upon thousands of pages of correspondence between the administrators in Port Blair and the masters of British India. No subject preoccupied these gentlemen as much, none generated as many pages of anxious inquiry and earnest recommendation, as the question of what to do with the Andamanese aborigines.

The British arrived in the islands determined that their conduct would be above reproach. They did not behave like the Americans on the Upper Plains or the Belgians in the Congo, raping and butchering for sport. Nor had they any desire to repeat the unpleasant experience of their compatriots in Tasmania, whose careless expansionism had led to the accidental extinction of an entire race. Rather, the first superintendent was dispatched to the Andamans, in 1858, with unequivocal instructions that the natives be treated with "the greatest forbearance and humanity," and that they be promptly informed "that our intentions towards the people of the islands are of the most friendly character."

Yet that message somehow failed to get across. The problem, at first, was that the Andamanese rarely let the Englishmen come close enough to have any semblance of conversation. No quantity of gifts left in their huts would soften their hostility. A surveying party would be out planning a road, or a team of convicts would be clearing jungle to make way for barracks, when the natives would suddenly set upon them from ambush, murdering as many as they could before being driven off. Afterward, the British felt they had no choice but to organize a retaliatory raid. (In one such engagement, seventy Andamanese were killed, and five soldiers received the Victoria Cross.) Some weeks later, fretful letters would arrive from the viceroy and his secretaries, urging renewed "conciliation and forbearance," reminding local authorities that "the Andaman Islanders, however low on the scale of civilisation, are British Subjects." But by that point the cycle had usually repeated itself.

Then, suddenly, the hostilities ceased almost entirely. There was one cataclysmic battle—fifteen hundred naked warriors came charging out of the jungle, straight up against the guns of a British warship, with predictably ghastly results—and after that, only a few desultory clashes. Quite unaccountably, the natives started wandering out into the settlement and behaving like friends: odd, bright-eyed little people whose merry air suggested that they had forgotten there had ever been bloodshed. The Andamanese would ask for gifts (coconuts, bananas, and, before long, tobacco and liquor) and make amiable sport with the British soldiers, plucking at the brigadesmen's red coats and pulling on their whiskers. They even began coming voluntarily to live in the "Andamanese Home," an institution for their welfare that the British established on Ross Island.

But in some ways, their presence was now even more nettlesome than

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it had been before. The Andamanese had certain noteworthy talents, but few that could profitably be applied to the needs of a colonial settlement. They were excellent bowmen, amazingly proficient swimmers (some could even shoot arrows accurately while treading water), uncanny mimics, and skilled jungle trackers, able to communicate across miles of forest by banging out signals on the buttress roots of certain trees. So the British put them to use hunting down escaped convicts—a reasonable occupation, though hardly enough to occupy them full-time. A few of the natives were employed as nannies, since it was quickly noticed that they were remarkably affectionate with children, the Europeans' as much as their own. Others were kept as objects of amusement in Port Blair households, to be dressed up and coddled—at least until their masters' tours of duty ended, when they were left to fend for themselves. "The Government of [British] India," one official noted approvingly, "[has] adopted a policy towards the aborigines of the Andaman Islands which has made them, above all races of savages, the most carefully tended and petted." Here are some names given to Andamanese in the nineteenth century by the British, which I came across in various old documents: Topsy, Snowball, Jumbo, Kiddy Boy, Ruth, Naomi, Joseph, Crusoe, Friday, Tarbaby, King John, Moriarty, Toeless, Punch, Jacko, Jingo, Sambo, and Queen Victoria.

Experts—English clergymen and educators handpicked for their intelligence and conscientiousness—were entrusted with the task of civilizing them. They tried various techniques. Some did their best to teach the aborigines about clothing and the alphabet; others, attempting to win the natives' trust, smeared themselves with ochre body paint and joined in the tribal dances. They didn't make much progress either way. How could decent social behavior be taught to people whose culture had no concept of individual property, privacy, or political authority? How could Christianity be understood by people who—while they believed in various spirits, both benign and malignant—undertook no form of religious worship? How could math and science be imparted to people whose language had no numerals higher than three? So the Andamanese Home eventually became a sort of souvenir factory, where residents passed the time sitting on the ground, making their traditional baskets, bows, and arrows to be sold to English visitors.

At least the aborigines were not attacking settlers anymore. (A special constabulary force, the Bush Police, kept the still-hostile Jarawa safely at bay, while the Sentinelese, of course, remained in isolation.) But the natives' vitality had vanished along with their hostility. The first disquieting sign was what happened to their children: between 1864 and 1870, 150 babies were born in the Andamanese Home, and not a single one of them lived past the age of two. Venereal diseases soon appeared, despite the administrators' early hopes that Andamanese women would not prove

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sexually enticing to European men. (They based these hopes, in part, on what one of them delicately termed "an excessive development of fat around the gluteal region" of native females.) The history of the period can be summarized as a series of epidemics and dates, like a roster of military campaigns: pneumonia (1868), syphilis (1874), ophthalmia (1876), measles (1877), mumps (1886), Russian influenza (1890), gonorrhea (1892). When one of their number died, the Andamanese would weep piteously and embrace each other, but eventually they would seem to forget that the loved one had ever existed.

In 1858, it is believed, the aboriginal population of the Andaman Islands numbered at least 5,000. In 1931, the last time the British tried to count, it was estimated at 460.

On January 8, 1991, alongside articles titled "Poultry Training for Women" and "Oil Conservation Week Begins," the following front-page headline appeared in Port Blair's government-owned newspaper, *The Daily Telegrams*:

FIRST FRIENDLY CONTACT
WITH SENTINELESE

Four days earlier, a government contact party had paid a visit to North Sentinel, the first such expedition in more than a year. At first, as the anthropologists, constables, and officials approached the beach in the *Tarmugli*'s motorized dinghy, they could see no one on shore. Then, finally, a few Sentinelese stepped out from behind some bushes and started to gesture at the explorers, seemingly trying to indicate that they wanted gifts. As usual, the dinghy moved down the beach to a safe spot, and a crewman jumped out to drop off a bag of coconuts. As usual, the Sentinelese rushed down to grab it. But for the first time ever, the aborigines brought no weapons with them when they approached the water's edge—only mesh baskets and the iron-tipped wooden adzes they sometimes used to chop apart the coconuts. Emboldened, the dinghy's passengers tore open another sack of coconuts and threw them into the water. Five of the Sentinelese swam out to collect the nuts, and a few others brought out one of their canoes. The contact team members gestured to them to come closer, but the natives got nervous and went back onshore. Deciding that they had taken enough risks for one morning, the explorers went back to the *Tarmugli* for lunch.

In the afternoon, however, some of them decided to return. This time, they found at least two dozen aborigines waiting for them. One, a young man, was holding a bow and arrow, which he pointed at the intruders, but a woman quickly came over and pushed the arrow down. The man took his weapons and buried them in the sand. At this, a great many of the

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Sentinelese started running down the beach and splashing through the surf toward the dinghy. The leader of the contact party, a small, officious bureaucrat with the title Director of Tribal Welfare, stood up and started personally throwing coconuts out to them. Then the Director leapt from the boat into the chest-high water—one of the young Sentinelese men recoiled in fright—and handed coconuts to the tribesmen as they crowded around him. After he had gone through five bags of coconuts, he climbed into the dinghy, headed back to the *Tarmugli*, and returned to Port Blair to spread word of his triumph.

The news did not create much of a stir. There was some back-slapping among the local officials and, later, a bit of internal squabbling over which one of them really deserved the credit. An editorial declared that the Director of Tribal Welfare was a very brave man, and the Indian government really ought to give him some sort of medal. The story went unnoticed by the overseas press, perhaps because foreign-desk editors were preoccupied that week with a story that seemed far more momentous: the impending war over Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

T. N. Pandit missed the great event, too; he'd had a family emergency to take care of in Port Blair, so he'd sent two assistants in his place. A few weeks later, however, in February, he returned to North Sentinel with another expedition. This time, several Sentinelese men went so far as to climb into the dinghy and grab entire sacks of coconuts; one of them also spotted a policeman's rifle hidden in a corner of the boat and reached out curiously to touch it. Toward the end of the visit, Pandit was alone in the water with a group of Sentinelese; the other explorers had returned to the dinghy and started to drift away from him, and suddenly he found himself much nearer to the aborigines than to his own comrades. One of the young tribesmen looked at him, scowled, pulled out an iron-bladed knife, and made a gesture, Pandit says, "like he was going to cut out my heart. Maybe he thought I was planning to stay on the island." But the dinghy quickly returned to pick Pandit up. He would return to North Sentinel several more times before retiring from the Anthropological Survey in 1992.

Pandit says he was thrilled, at first, by his encounters with the Sentinelese. "That they voluntarily came forward to meet us—it was unbelievable," he told me, the last time we met at my hotel in New Delhi. "They must have come to a decision that the time had come. It could not have happened on the spur of the moment.

"But there was this feeling of sadness also—I did feel it. And there was the feeling that at a larger scale of human history, these people who were holding back, holding on, ultimately had to yield. It's like an era in history gone. The islands have gone. Until the other day, the Sentinelese were holding the flag, unknown to themselves. They were being heroes. But they have also given up.

"They would not have survived forever—that, I can reason out. On a

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scientific basis, we can say that this population might have lived for another hundred years, but eventually. . . . Even destruction takes place in the natural course of things; no one can help it, it happens. But here we have been doing it in a very conscious way, knowing full well what the consequences could be. What would be and what could be are the same."

On December 31, 1857—the last day of the last year before their world began to end—a group of Andamanese went down to catch fish off the beach at South Reef Island, a tiny islet in the northern part of the archipelago. They brought with them bows and arrows, nets woven of bark fiber, and seven outrigger canoes, delicate little craft that they had made by laboriously hollowing out the trunks of fallen trees. (Many of the possessions they were carrying that day are now in the British Museum.) Before the fishermen had a chance to push their boats out into the surf, however, they saw something strange in the distance: an immense black shape, half ship and half sea monster, coughing out great exhalations of dark smoke as it moved across the ocean. It was coming toward them.

The vessel was a small East India Company steamer, inauspiciously named the *Pluto*, that had left Calcutta several weeks earlier on a mission to investigate the Andaman Islands, particularly their suitability as the site of a new penal colony. (On the Indian mainland, the Great Mutiny was in full blaze, and British jails were overflowing.) Despite the gravity of their assignment, the explorers had had a pleasant journey. Like many ships of its era, the *Pluto* was a kind of floating experiment in multiculturalism—its crew and officers included not just Britons but Irishmen, Italians, Maltese, Scandinavians, Portuguese, Americans, Chinese, Africans, Bengalis, Burmese, Malaysians, a Frenchman, and an Arab—and in this case, the experiment turned out quite well. A Scottish sailor entertained his shipmates on the bagpipes; some Goan sailors formed an impromptu band; and the Arab boatswain strummed melancholy airs on his guitar. At Christmas, crewmen held sack races on the steamer's deck and boat races around its hull. The government officials on board—members of a special "Andaman Committee" appointed by the East India Company's directors—were also in a good mood, because they had already found a splendid site for a penal settlement (the future Port Blair) and were headed back to Calcutta with this happy news.

Their one disappointment was their failure, so far, to have any significant interaction with the Andamanese aborigines. There had been a few brief glimpses, a few arrows ineffectually fired, and that was all. So when the officials caught sight of the native fishermen on the beach at South Reef Island, they decided that here was an opportunity they did not want to miss. The *Pluto* hove to and lowered its longboats; the native canoes also put to sea and approached the steamer. As they drew closer, the chairman of the Andaman Committee stood up in the stern of his longboat and

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started waving a white pocket-handkerchief, hoping that the aborigines would recognize this international symbol of peaceful intentions.

A beautiful old lithograph freezes in time the moment before the two sides met. Sunlight slants down through high banks of cumulus clouds. The *Pluto* rides gracefully on the water, twin masts slightly raked, British ensign flying proudly at the stern rail. The longboats, bristling with oars, cut across scallop-edged waves. The canoes are little more than lines above the water, their passengers stick figures silhouetted by the sun. On the beach more stick figures watch from beside a mound of jungle.

A moment later, everything exploded. The aborigines fired first; the Andaman Committee, an instant later. Three Andamanese were shot dead, including one warrior—a "chief," the committee later decided—who sank down in his canoe "almost with the dignity of Caesar." The survivors leapt into the sea and made for shore. All was chaos in the explorers' longboats as well: men howled in pain, some of them wounded by arrows and others by a volley of bullets that the second boat had accidentally discharged at the first.

And somehow, amid this confusion, an Andamanese ended up inside one of the European boats. It is not clear how he got there. The only sources we have are two different accounts by the Andaman Committee chairman; one says that the man was seized as he tried to swim away; the other, that he grabbed a leather strap thrown to him from the longboat. Willingly or not, he fell into enemy hands, and was brought back to the *Pluto.*

Once aboard the steamer, at least, he does not seem to have struggled. The sailors promptly named him Jack, and dressed him in an old coat and trousers. (The clothes must have belonged to one of the cabin boys, since Jack, though a fullgrown adult, was well under five feet.) One of the crewmen gave him a plug of chewing tobacco, which he swallowed; another tried to teach him, unsuccessfully, to smoke a clay pipe. Meanwhile, the members of the Andaman Committee earnestly debated what to do with him. They finally decided, in "the interests of humanity," to take him with them. So the *Pluto* got up steam and headed north again, with Jack gazing wistfully over the rail as the Andaman Islands slipped into the distance. The only thing that cheered him up was Neptune, the ship's dog, who came trotting over to sniff at him. Remarkably—for dogs were completely unknown to the Andamanese—Jack threw his arms around the animal's neck and began to caress it, and the two were inseparable companions for the rest of the voyage.

Back in Calcutta, where the Andamanese warrior was kept in the Andaman Committee chairman's own house, he became an object of intense interest, and his spirits improved a bit. He was given a fine suit of clothes, shown off at tea parties, and taken out for drives in a carriage. He was introduced to the viceroy, Lord Canning, as well as to Canning's wife, whom he attempted to greet in traditional Andamanese fashion by blow-

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ing into her hand with a cooing murmur. (Her ladyship declined the honor.) He was also taken to visit a photographer so that his picture could be sent to the great German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt. Jack's keepers wanted him to pose naked for the camera, but by this time he had grown used to European modesty, so it took some effort before he acquiesced, and in the resulting photograph, he squints awkwardly into the lens. Still, it is recorded that when this picture was shown to its subject, he laughed heartily and exclaimed, "Jack!"

One night, however, after Jack had been in Calcutta for less than two weeks, he awoke with severe pains in his abdomen. A doctor rushed to his bedside and found that his case presented all the symptoms of cholera. Mustard poultices and blisters were applied, and after a few days the cholera seemed to pass, but by now Jack was also suffering from severe inflammation of the lungs. Earnest consultations were held at the highest levels of government (in the National Archives of India, there is a scribbled note in Lord Canning's own hand, inquiring anxiously about Jack's health), and it was quickly agreed that the unfortunate captive should return to his home. Since this meant depriving him of European medicine, it is odd that the British officials were so eager to relieve themselves of his presence—but in any case, they were.

So, by order of the viceroy, Jack was loaded with as many presents as he could carry—pots, pans, beads, mirrors, carpentry tools, cloth, thread—and put again aboard the *Pluto*. The steamer reached South Reef Island early one morning and, after a final set of anatomical measurements was taken, Jack was put ashore. (When the longboat approached, some natives were spotted watching from the beach, but they fled before it reached them.) By this time, his medical condition had worsened.

"It could not be ascertained," the *Pluto*'s surgeon reported, "whether he was pleased or not at being restored to his home." But the sailors made their affectionate farewells, unloaded the gifts, and set Jack's fine new clothes by his side, in a little heap on the sand. As they rowed back toward the steamer, they could see him standing there silently where they had left him, naked again on the beach.

One day in Port Blair, I went to visit the Mohameds' scrapyard. The Mohameds are five Muslim brothers from Madras, ship-breakers who were given a government permit to salvage metal from the wreck of the *Primrose*. They live and work near the waterfront in a big tin-roofed shed, a museum of the reclaimed junk of the twentieth century: huge rusty cogs and chains, oil drums and sections of hull plating.

Only two of the brothers were in when I went to see them, but they courteously offered me tea and shared their recollections of North Sentinel Island. They had gone there sporadically for nearly a decade until 1997, often spending days at a time living aboard their boat,

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which they anchored near the freighter's hulk. On their first visit, some Sentinelese came down to the beach waving weapons, and even though one of the brothers waved a white sheet in response, the natives started shooting arrows, so one of the salvors' police escort fired shots in the air. Thereafter, the Mohameds worked unmolested. They often saw the tribesmen fishing from their canoes, and sometimes, on nights when there was a full moon, they would be awakened by voices singing around bonfires on the beach. The salvors never tried to go ashore.

"But one day," the elder of the two brothers told me, "when I was working on the *Primrose*, I saw something floating in the water, and I jumped in to get it. I can show it to you, if you want." He went upstairs and rummaged around for a few minutes in the loft that served as his bedroom, and when he returned he was carrying a Sentinelese bow.

It was a lovely thing, tall and very slightly flexed, fashioned from the wood of some exotic tree. Its curved surfaces were broken into planes, long scraped striations from the adze that had shaped it. When I ran my fingertips along the concave side, they brushed against something rough: several tiny rows of zigzag lines incised into the wood.

"You know," I blurted out, "if you ever wanted to sell this, I would give you, I don't know, six thousand rupees." It was the first sum that came into my head, but I knew it was far more than most Indians earned in a month.

The scrap dealer looked at me steadily. "No," he said. "Even my oldest brother has asked me many times to give him this. If I cannot give it to him, I cannot give it to you." Suddenly I didn't want the bow, felt wrong for having wanted it, but I smiled to show that I understood.

I had arrived in Port Blair expecting to learn the worst—that North Sentinel was already a stop on the ecotourism circuit, or that the local administration (as it's done with the surviving remnants of the other, "friendly" Andamanese tribes) had gone in and built a new settlement for the Sentinelese, complete with a communal television set. Instead, there was much more surprising news: the island, for the first time in thirty years, was being left completely alone. The gift-dropping missions had ended in 1996. There was still no television set on North Sentinel; it remained, like Prospero's island, a place where the air shimmered with invisible signals, with unseen Hindi soap operas and Thai music that drifted, unheard, across the Andaman Sea.

None of the local officials would give me a clear explanation of why the visits had been suspended. I was chased out of offices, and bureaucrats whose job it was to set tribal policy told me it wasn't their job to set tribal policy. The most I could learn was that there had been occasional visits after Pandit's retirement, but that they hadn't always been friendly. Several times, the Sentinelese had aimed their arrows at the contact party, and once they had nearly destroyed a wooden dinghy, hack-

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ing at it with their adzes. The explorers had never progressed much beyond the point of handing coconuts to the natives as they stood in the surf.

But when I went to the office of the Anthropological Survey and met the young scientist who now has Pandit's job, he told me something that, when I thought about it long afterward, seemed to answer some of my questions. "You're in luck," he said when I told him I had come to the Andamans to research the native tribes. "You have arrived here at a very interesting time. The Jarawa seem to have finally decided to end their isolation." The way he said this left me uncertain whether he was pleased about it or not.

Actually, I'd already heard hints of the big news about the Jarawa. When I'd arrived in the Andamans, I hadn't expected to see anything of them—even though the Jarawa live in the jungles of Great Andaman, and had their "first friendly contact" with anthropologists two decades before the Sentinelese, Pandit had told me that they'd remained mostly hostile to outsiders, untouched by modern culture. Only a few dozen living people had ever even glimpsed a Jarawa in the flesh, he'd said. But I'd hardly stepped off the ship from Calcutta before I'd been invited to visit them.

On my first full day in the islands, a Sunday, I'd gone snorkeling at the Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park, which lies off the west side of Great Andaman, a short bus trip from Port Blair. At the park's entrance, I boarded a ferryboat, along with a few dozen other tourists—mostly middle-class Indians from the mainland—and was taken out to a tiny, gloriously uninhabited island, where for the next few hours we had the run of the place. Honeymoon couples from Calcutta held hands on the shore, while in the water the director of a mining company in Rajasthan paddled gravely back and forth, looking at tropical fish.

I'd heard that on clear days you could see North Sentinel from this island, so I walked around to the part of the beach where I thought it might be. The sky was too hazy, it turned out. But as I stood there looking, someone came up to me and asked, in broken English, if he could help. The man—I'll call him Jyoti—was a Bengali, short, tanned, and deep-chested, with a ragged fringe of beard. He lived, he told me, in one of the nearby fishing villages, and had worked as a shell diver until recently, when he began trying to earn a living as a tourist guide. I asked him if he had ever gone to North Sentinel.

"Yes, many times I am going. Never landing, staying offshore, two hundred meters, catching fish, catching shells. Sometimes seeing people."

"Could I ever go there with you?"

Jyoti laughed. "No, too much danger. I go in fishing boat, Coast Guard

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helicopter coming, seeing me, waving, no problems. You come in boat, helicopter seeing you, coming, arresting. Very un-legal."

However, if I was interested in the Andamanese tribes, Jyoti told me, there was another place he could take me without running afoul of the law. He had some cousins who lived near a village called Tirur, up against the edge of the Jarawa Tribal Reserve. He'd heard from them that over the past few weeks, some Jarawa had occasionally come out of the jungle and into the outskirts of the Indian settlements. If we went there, he could help me interview the villagers, and I might even see some aborigines.

So, several days later, we hired a Maruti minivan and a driver, and headed up toward Jarawa country. I'd discussed my plans already with the anthropologists in Port Blair, and they'd suggested that on arriving in Tirur, I should check in with a certain Inspector Khan, who commanded the local unit of the Bush Police. This was the special constabulary founded by the British to contain the Jarawa—and half a century after the British left, it is still in place.

The road to Tirur starts out well enough, on a straight course through rice paddies and coconut plantations, and then, less than an hour outside Port Blair, becomes a rutted track hemmed in by banyans and peepuls, palms and hibiscus. For some time it continues indecisively, not sure if it wants to be paved or unpaved, before settling finally on un-. Past this point there are three more villages—no more than clusters of thatched huts by the roadside, really—and the last of these, the farthest outpost of civilization, is Tirur.

Our minivan pulled to a stop, and Jyoti leaned out the window to ask where we could find Inspector Khan. The man said something in Bengali and pointed up the road. Jyoti translated for me: "He says tribal people is come and Khan *sahib* is go in van and sit by jungle."

After just a hundred yards or so, the road veered left, into a sudden narrow sunny valley, where it ended. Ahead was a single strip of paddy land, bounded by the great dark wall of the jungle, which was higher than I'd expected it to be, blocking half the sky. Right in front of us was an ancient, navy blue police van, and next to the van stood two groups of men, apparently having a conversation. All of them were dressed in the faded khaki bush shirts that are ubiquitous in the Andaman back-country. As we got out to meet them, one of the groups turned to go, and I noticed that these men were much smaller than the others—tiny, even, like children. They were setting out single-file down a muddy little path through the paddy toward the trees. Around their necks they wore odd fringes of brown fiber. The last one in line turned, waved, and smiled, teeth flashing preternaturally white in his dark face—and I realized at last that they were Jarawa.

They had come out of the jungle the previous night, eighteen in all, and camped by the edge of the rice fields. In the morning, the police had

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come to give them coconuts and bananas, and some of the villagers, offended by the tribesmen's nudity, had given them old clothes to wear for as long as they were in the settlement. Now, the last half-dozen Jarawa were making their way back toward the forest, carrying mesh baskets loaded with fruit. They waded across a knee-deep stream, and I saw that they were naked beneath the oversized shirts, their buttocks splashed with yellow mud. Every few steps they turned again, and waved, and shouted *"Lalay!"*, and the people on the road shouted the same word back. This is one of the few words of Jarawa that the anthropologists think they understand; it means *friend.*

As the aborigines reached the midpoint of the field, the rearmost of them turned and seemed to notice me for the first time—I was convinced of it—and smiled, and waved, and shouted, and before I knew it I was grinning like an idiot, waving and shouting too: *"Lalay! Lalay!"* Then their small dark shapes merged with the great dark mass of the jungle, and the valley was empty except for a few water buffalo and a sudden flight of white cranes, and I took my first good look at the civilized men.

In the same year that the *Pluto* first came to the Andamans, on the other side of the world, Henry David Thoreau traveled up to Maine and—for the last time in his life—climbed Mount Katahdin, accompanied by a Penobscot Indian guide. It was a sacred place for him, one that induced transcendental raptures of a greater-than-usual intensity. Once, after crossing a secluded meadow on the mountainside (a place, he thought, "perhaps never seen by a white man before), he wrote:

> What is it to be admitted to a museum, to see a myriad of particular things, compared with being shown some star's surface, some hard matter in its home! I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become strange to me. . . . What is this Titan that has possession of me? Talk of mysteries! Think of our life in nature,—daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it,—rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the *solid* earth! the *actual* world! the *common sense! Contact! Contact! Who* are we? *where* are we?

Khan *sahib*—a large man with a paunch and a gray mustache, the invariable attributes of Indian law enforcement—was the only policeman I saw in the group; the others were villagers. As soon as I had explained who I was and why I had come, they were eager to tell me about their recent experiences with the Jarawa. Although they had spent their lives mere yards away from the Jarawa reserve, few of them had even seen an aborigine until a few weeks before.

Tirur was settled in the 1950s, by Bengali rice farmers displaced in

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the Partition, and ever since—like other frontier villages in the Andamans—it had come under occasional attack from the aborigines. The bowmen shot from ambush, often at night; if you got close enough to glimpse one, it usually meant that you were seconds away from death. In 1997, however, something unusual happened: three Burmese poachers came straggling out of the jungle, badly wounded, and turned themselves in at the local Bush Police outpost. They had been illegally cutting rare hardwoods deep inside the tribal reserve when the Jarawa ambushed them. Three of their companions were killed on the spot. The bodies were found by a police boat on the western beach of Great Andaman some days later; they lay in a row, horribly mutilated, facing the sea.

After this, the attacks on Tirur intensified. Half-a-dozen villagers (in a population of 350) were killed by Jarawa arrows, the latest one just this past March. She was an old woman, the mother of a local farmer, and she was working alone in his rice paddy, a field not a hundred yards from us, when the Jarawa crept up on her from the forest. Her son found her, a little while later, with an arrow sticking out from—he gestured to show me—the middle of her chest. But after that, the killing had stopped. All was quiet until just a few weeks ago, when a group of Jarawa had come out, unarmed and perfectly cheerful, and showed by signs that they wanted coconuts. Since then, more had come every few days, taking gifts before they went back into the jungle. No one knew why.

After I'd finished talking with the villagers, we climbed into the minivan and followed Khan back to the Bush Police outpost. It was a simple structure, with walls of bamboo latticework. On a table sat a kerosene lantern, a few empty cartridge boxes, and a rifle that looked to be of World War I vintage. On another, higher, table, half-covered by a flower-printed cloth, was a small black-and-white television set.

The government's contact missions to befriend the Jarawa, Khan explained, had had a limited effect. After twenty-five years of the joyful encounters that Pandit had told me about, the Jarawa still hadn't stopped attacking settlers—and in any case, the expeditions had focused on only one group of aborigines, fifty miles north of here. Two years ago, those northern Jarawa started coming into the settlements and asking for gifts. As they grew bolder, they became more of a nuisance: stealing things from villagers, sleeping in Bush Police stations, even, recently, boarding public buses, much to the passengers' alarm. Not long ago, several were found to have chest infections that appeared to be viral pneumonia. The Andaman administration was at a loss over what to do. As long as it had been the civilized people who were sending contact parties to the Jarawa, everything had been simple enough. Now that the Jarawa themselves were sending contact parties into civilization, matters had taken a most unpleasant turn. And now the southern Jarawa, too, the ones near Tirur, had started to emerge from the jungle.

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Still, Khan said that he had no desire to return to the old days. One of his own constables had been wounded in an ambush early this year, probably by the same aborigines we'd seen this morning; the arrow's iron tip had entered his brain, poor fellow, and he was still in a rehabilitation hospital in Madras, with little prospect of ever leaving. Khan would rather give the Jarawa as many coconuts as they liked than have to face that again.

Then, too, he told me, there had been some interesting—even amusing—moments since the aborigines had become friendly. Just two weeks ago, for instance, several had happened to come to this police station while the constables were watching television. At first, they'd stared at the set in amazement, but then after a few minutes they sat down—one of them on the floor, two others atop Khan's desk—and started to watch. They laughed, pointed, talked excitedly in Jarawa. There was a Hindi film on the television, Khan remembered, and then a boxing match. They'd particularly liked the boxing match.

Later that day, after we'd left the Tirur police outpost, Jyoti and I were sitting outside his cousins' house, where we'd just finished lunch, and I asked him again, more urgently this time, about visiting North Sentinel Island. "Impossible," he said, shaking his head. "Too much risk." I pleaded my case yet again. And at last he looked up, shrugged, and said: "Is danger. Is risk. But I think we take risk."

In 1768, midway through his voyage across the Pacific, the French explorer Louis Antoine de Bougainville sighted a beautiful island rising out of the sea. When the mariners came ashore, the islanders spread the floors of their huts with flowers and green leaves, and as native musicians, in the captain's words, "sang an hymeneal song to the tune of their flutes," crowds gathered and watched the Frenchmen and island women lie down, two by two, to make love on the leafy beds. The place already had a name—Tahiti—but Bougainville would call it *La Nouvelle Cythère*, after the island where Aphrodite was born from the waves.

In 1998, some German backpackers in Port Blair were out drinking with a local man, a notorious confidence artist, when they mentioned to him that they would like to have sex with a Jarawa girl. So the man found a half-Andamanese prostitute (one of the last descendants of the "friendly" tribes of British days), stripped her naked, and decked out her neck and arms in his best approximation of bark-fiber fringes. He showed her to the Germans and told them she was Jarawa. They paid him five hundred rupees and had sex with her, one after the other.

We went to the island a few days before I was to leave the Andamans. Jyoti arranged for a boat and crew; our cover story was to be that we were fishing, and if a navy patrol approached, I would duck under a tarp and pretend to be a sleeping fisherman. To be on the safe side, we

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would leave under cover of darkness. So the afternoon before our departure, I packed up all the special outdoor gear I'd brought from America (synthetic-fiber camping shirt, sun hat, pen-sized flashlight, new camera), boarded a bus in Port Blair, and rode to Wandoor, a village on the western coast of Great Andaman. I went to sleep that evening in Jyoti's house—a cottage with packed-earth floors and palm-leaf walls—and an hour or so after midnight, he shook me awake.

I grabbed my knapsack and we walked in silence down to the shore, through groves of coconut trees thrumming with the noises of the tropical night. The moon was out, a pale half-circle ringed with cloud. The path through the trees was uneven in places, churned up by the passage of people and animals, so I reached for my flashlight, but before I could turn it on, Jyoti whispered sternly, "No torch. Moon is our torch." We continued until we came to a gravel road along the sea-wall, and there Jyoti left me, in a shadowed spot by the water's edge, and went down to the jetty to find the boatmen. I waited for a long time—looking at the stars, shivering a little in the night air—before he returned, so long that he startled me when I heard his footsteps again. Now he took my flashlight from me, pointed it out to sea, and switched it on and off quickly, twice. From somewhere in the distance, among the dark silhouettes of the inshore islands, came the *chuk-chuk-chuk* of an engine.

One of the silhouettes seemed to detach itself and float nearer, and as it drew toward us the engine cut off and the dinghy glided up to shore. Jyoti and I waded through the water and climbed in. The fishing boat was small, less than twenty feet, and made of hand-hewn teak, with an inboard motor amidships. I could make out two figures at the tiller, short and slightly built, like boys; they did not speak, but passed me a plastic tarp to keep close at hand. I took my place in the bow. There was no deck, no seat, just the hard timbers of the boat's frame. It was so narrow I could grasp both gunwales with my elbows bent at my sides.

The boatmen had decided it would be too dangerous to go to North Sentinel alone: if a storm blew up suddenly, or we had engine trouble, there would be no one to save us. So even though it meant splitting up the money I had agreed to pay them, they'd brought a second boat. Off the farthermost of the inshore islands we lay to; our flashlight signalled and was answered, and soon the other dinghy joined us, trailing somewhere off astern.

Then for a long while there was nothing but the nearness of the warm black sea, the noise of the engine, and the white lines of our wake falling endlessly away. On this voyage there would be no raising or lowering of sails, no depth soundings, no sextant readings. The boatmen were steering by the stars, or by some private sense of direction; I couldn't tell. Jyoti wrapped himself in a tarp and slept. A light rain fell, and then stopped. Every so often, a spark leaped from the exhaust pipe of the inboard motor

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pipe of the inboard motor and tumbled into the sea, where it seemed to float for an instant before dying out. Once, I saw a faint reddish glint far to the west, like the beacon of a ship.

The clouds, high and scattered, were the first things to catch the rising light, then gradually the faces of the two boatmen, who I saw now were not boys at all, but men, skinny and bearded. One of them had a cloth wrapped, turbanlike, around his head. They spoke no English, and in any case the din of the engine made conversation impossible. I wondered what they knew about why we were going on this journey, and then I wondered what I knew about it, myself.

I crouched down and slept between the wooden walls of the bow, and when I woke up a little while later, a red band lay over the horizon behind us—and the island, like its dark reflection, on the horizon ahead. Sheet lightning flashed beyond it, far away. I could now make out the boat that was following us; it was built in a traditional shape that I'd seen before in the Andamans, with a high squared-off prow like a war canoe's. In both boats, the men had fishing lines out—it was our alibi, and besides, why not fish?—and every so often they would stop to pull in a tuna or a snapper, hand over hand, without tackle.

As we drew nearer to land, green leaves drifted past us, and the mangled limb of some tropical plant. From a stripe of neutral color, the island resolved itself gradually into a slab of beach piled high with trees—now visible, now invisible behind the swells. The closer it came, the more the sea around us sprang to life: dolphins leaped around our bow, flying fish skittered past, and startling turquoise shallows, crowded with corals, surged suddenly from the depths. The dreary land gave out no such signs; it was like a place where no one had ever lived, or ever would. The clouds above it looked more substantial than itself.

In a curio shop in Calcutta, on a whim, I had purchased a telescope: an ancient, cumbersome thing, bound in brass and leather—doubtless, I'd imagined, a relic of some long-dead Conradian sea captain. I unscrewed its lens cap now, and trained it on North Sentinel. We were as close now as we could safely come; a bulwark of breakers, ten feet high, rolled down onto the reef not far ahead of us, and two hundred yards or so beyond that lay the shore. Every tree trunk I looked at was a man, every piece of driftwood a beached canoe. But they were just trees and more trees, driftwood and more driftwood. Hoping to circumnavigate the island, we turned northward now and skirted the reef, and the incessant coastline unscrolled before us, like a loop of silent film.

I looked up at the thickening clouds. When I'd planned my trip to the Andamans, I'd checked to find out when their yearly monsoon season ended. Some of the guidebooks said October, others November. Because I was eager to make the trip, I'd decided to believe the ones that said October. They were wrong. It was now mid-November, and the mon-

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soon was still in full force. Since I'd arrived in Port Blair, the storms had come every day or two, sudden and intense. I hoped this wouldn't be one of those days. There was no radio in our boat, of course, no life preservers. We were twenty-five miles from home, and had seen no other ships. And we were already taking on a bit of water through our hull. Every few minutes, one of the boatmen would stoop to bail with a plastic bucket.

Then Jyoti grabbed my arm. "Look," he said. "Tribal."

At first, I couldn't see the thing he was pointing at. And when I saw it, it looked too small to be a person, too small to be a tree stump, even. Then it stood up and walked across the beach.

Along this part of the shoreline, the forest grew high and dense, seeming almost to overhang the surf. The man, or perhaps it was a woman, had walked over to stand under this canopy, beneath a low, spreading tree. We cut our engine and I stood up with my telescope. I glimpsed two other figures beneath the tree, their upper bodies in shadow, their bare legs shifting shapes against the sand. They were facing us, and one of them was holding something long and thin—a spear? A bow? Impossible to tell. I couldn't hold my telescope in position with the swell beneath our boat; the small circle of vision momentarily caught the group of figures, then swung wildly toward the ocean or the sky. The reefs allowed us no closer. We were too far to shout or signal, even if we'd known what to say. There was nothing to do but move on.

So our dinghy continued, with the other still trailing behind, across the north coast of the island now, past dunes overgrown with scrubby bushes, and vapor rising from the jungle beyond. As we approached the far corner I saw that it came to a point, with a tiny islet lying just offshore. The breakers here were higher than we'd seen elsewhere, stretching in an unbroken line along the reef, and just inside them another, smaller line of surf crashed against something else: a low barrier of blackened metal. It was the *Primrose*, pruned back by the Mohamed brothers nearly to the waterline.

And between the *Primrose* and the beach, there was another boat: a Sentinelese canoe. It lay several hundred yards off, but we could see its profile clearly—a brown line above the water, with one figure seated toward the bow and another standing, poling, at the stern. They were probably fishing. I was sure they were watching us, though I now realize I could not possibly have seen that from such a distance. But beyond the impenetrable fence of surf, they were following a course like ours, westward alongshore, riding more easily than we were on their calmer patch of sea. For a minute or so the three of us were all parallel. I was standing in the bow—snapping pictures, scribbling notes—and saw our vessels click into alignment: two small fishing boats, with an upright figure in each, and between us, the dystopian ruin of the freighter.

Suddenly, I noticed that Jyoti was not paying attention to the canoe.

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He was staring in the other direction, seaward. "Look," he said to me, for the second time that morning.

It was a waterspout. I watched it in amazement: an elegant column, hundreds of feet high, drifting toward us across the gray pavement of the sea. Behind it, I saw, was a wall of black clouds. "Is weather," Jyoti said. "Very, very bad danger. Now we go back."

The crewmen were shouting in Bengali, standing up and waving to the other dinghy: go back, go back. I realized what had happened. We'd just been rounding the northwest corner of North Sentinel, coming around onto the island's farther shore; there was nothing beyond it for hundreds of miles but the Indian Ocean. Now the weather that the land had blocked from view lay directly in our path. We reversed course and started to flee.

The dinghy made as much headway as its eight-horsepower engine could manage across the mounting swells. It was pitifully slow. After five minutes or so we'd all realized the effort was useless. The waterspout had disappeared now, absorbed somewhere into the shifting curtains of water behind it, but the storm front looked worse, and was coming up fast. The boatmen waved and shouted again, and this time they brought us around toward the storm. Jyoti explained: they'd seen a gap in the clouds—black wall on one side, black wall on the other, but a narrow gray defile in the middle—and our best hope was to try to run through it.

A minute or two later, the opening in the clouds slid shut. We could only ride out the storm. The crewmen brought us up as close to the reef as they dared, pointed our bow at the advancing weather, and dropped anchor. I was as near to the island then as I would ever get. The boatmen pulled out several blue tarps and ducked beneath them, hunkering down in the bottom of the dinghy. They gestured at me to duck under my tarp, as well, but I preferred to see what was coming. I was more worried at this point about my notebook and camera than anything else, so I zipped them into my knapsack, wrapped it in the plastic sheet as well as I could, and cradled the unwieldy bundle in my lap.

The island was dark again, as it had been when we'd seen it in the distance at sunrise, but this time the sky was darkening too, and rushing to meet the land. The Sentinelese canoe had vanished. White streamers of mist that had lain atop the jungle reared upward, sucked by a sudden swift draft. For a moment everything was silent except the crashing of the surf, until the wind blew in. Waves struck against us; the line of breakers exploded like a train of powder. And then the rain came, aimed almost from the land itself; drenching the telescope, and the knapsack, and the Nikon camera, soaking through my clothes into my moneybelt and bleeding the ink of my passport; beating down on the island, and the wreck of the *Primrose*, and our nameless boat.

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On the Street

MARIANNE BORUCH

The guy walking ahead, his boot
flares up, yellow
tulip tree leaf wet
to one sole, briefly, so brilliant,
then the boot's down again, then up
to the world, leaf intact,
and down to the dark, then back, bright
staccato all the way
up Pearl Street, turning—but I
still see it—down Vine.
And what to make of this,
this dismal November day,
the stark crisscross of trees, the stray cat
starved again, heading
for the dumpster. But she's
wild. She won't let me near. And still
this perfect flash of something,
something
I say out loud, in the cold air.

Marianne Boruch teaches at Purdue University and is the author of *Poetry's Old Air* (essays) and four volumes of poetry, which most recently include *A Stick that Breaks* and *Breaks* and *Moss Burning*.

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"Use Trouble"

MICHAEL S. HARPER

for Jacob Armstead Lawrence
1917–2000, in memoriam

You told this to the children
when they confessed their works

were incomplete your dignity grace
a mapped space for trouble

your *migration* series at 23
synaptic code for having nothing

as you built off the backs of the poor
your symmetries where paint was talk

"gumbo yaya" Hayden (your collaborator)
coined it about his native paradise valley

a nourishment of the Detroit ghetto
while you were content with Harlem

a sixty-block walk to MOMA
for filial instruction

of the Italian Renaissance:
now in Seattle they lay you down

those parts Indian of your heritage
in Chief Seattle's words

migraines at gunpoint
bullet-ridden love song as migrants

to the highest plane
a vast battlefield of tones

over vegetation of the visible
where there is no insurance

yet in retrospective fantasy
to remake the spirit in your name

Michael S. Harper is University Professor and Professor of English at Brown. He is the author of *Songlines in Michaeltree* and co-editor, with Anthony Walton, of *The Vintage Book of African American Poetry*.

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Starting from Scratch

ROGER SHATTUCK

Imagine that you are the editor of a literary review that publishes essays, fiction, and poetry. The morning mail has brought in, from a literary agent unknown to you, this letter: "Here's the opening paragraph of a manuscript I believe your readers will welcome. Don't worry about who wrote it; just see how you like it. Call me if you want to have the full manuscript."

Over the years, you have adopted the practice of moving from your desk to a chair by the window when you read a submitted manuscript. In that position, you feel both more alert and more relaxed. You read slowly, and half aloud. Here is the paragraph you read by the window:

> I have an island in the palm of my right hand. It is quite large and shaped like an almond. To make this island, the fate line splits in two in the middle, then comes together again up toward the Mount of Jupiter. I don't know what an island means in palmistry. No two people ever interpret it alike. But it looks to me, and that is enough for me, as if it meant that a quiet respectable fate were suddenly going to explode in the middle of life into something entirely new and strange, and then be folded together again and go on as quietly as it began. And because something of this kind has happened to me I get a rather foolish magic-loving satisfaction from believing that my island represents that period, the cycle of precious experience which befell me and which I am going to write about. . . . I treasure that little thing in my hand. I pore over it reminiscently, gratefully. I like to know it is there. It is the lucky coin

Roger Shattuck taught for many years at Boston University and now lives in Vermont. His most recent books are *Candor and Perversion: Literature, Education, and the Arts* and *Proust's Way: A Field Guide to* In Search of Lost Time. This essay was adapted from the opening lecture in the series "Conversations on Coherence" at the University of North Texas.

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> that saved me. It is the wafer of beneficent magic that made everything all right at last. It is the yeast that made my life rise.

"Wonderful rhythms. Why do I think it's a woman talking? An unknown work by a famous author? Not Virginia Woolf. Not Edith Wharton. Maybe it's a hoax to test my knowledge and competence as an editor. Who is this agent?"

You start reading again. "*I have an island* . . . (not in the Aegean, not in a Swiss lake). . . *in the palm of my right hand.* Surprising shift of scale and focus there. *It is quite large and shaped like an almond. To make this island, the fate line splits in two in the middle, then comes together again up toward the Mount of Jupiter. I don't know what an island means in palmistry. No two people ever interpret it alike.* To here, five short, simple sentences." You number the sentences and the lines: thirteen sentences, fifteen lines.

"An almost symmetrical paragraph, like Mt. Fuji. Five short sentences. Then two long, four-line sentences in the middle, with *but* and *and* to flag them. Then six short sentences to close. An island made of prose. Also a strong explosion, contained and shaped by the style. Is it all too controlled?" You continue reading.

> [6] But it looks to me, and that is enough for me, as if it meant that a quiet respectable fate were suddenly going to explode in the middle of life into something entirely new and strange, and then be folded together again and go on as quietly as it began. [7] And because something of this kind has happened to me I get a rather foolish magic-loving satisfaction from believing that my island represents that period, the cycle of precious experience which befell me and which I am going to write about. . . . [8] I treasure that little thing in my hand. [9] I pore over it reminiscently, gratefully. [10] I like to know it is there. [11] It is the lucky coin that saved me. [12] It is the wafer of beneficent magic that made everything all right at last. [13] It is the yeast that made my life rise.

"Beautifully phrased and timed. But there's something naïve about the voice. *Fate. Experience. Magic. Life.* No one has yet jolted the romantic strain out of this sensibility. A self-indulgent voice. Except for the word *foolish* in the seventh sentence. She gently mocks herself. Or he. The metaphors seem a bit mixed at the end: *coin, wafer, yeast.* It must be those down-to-earth, concrete references that make me think of Thoreau. The specific detail and the isolation. There's no one else present in this passage. Gérard de Nerval began a story: 'Le Rêve est une seconde vie.' 'Dream is a second life. I trembled to pierce those gates of ivory or of horn that separate us from the invisible.' But Nerval has already floated into abstraction. Maybe Hemingway's opening line for 'Now I Lay Me': 'That night we lay on the floor in the room and I

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listened to the silk-worms eating.' He starts off in concrete sensation and detail.

"It's a coherent paragraph, all right. Just a part, but it gives me a sense of the whole to come. And it establishes a distinct forward movement, whoever wrote it. The voice holds it together, a voice that has eliminated the rest of the world and concentrates on a single hand as an adequate representation of life. Okay, a concrete universal. . . . Well, I'll call that literary agent and have the rest of the manuscript sent to me. What would happen if agents started making blind submissions the rule? Puts you on your mettle."

This stream of thoughts glides through your mind in half-articulated form. The whole reading takes no more than five minutes. You lift the telephone and dial the number, feeling both intrigued by the challenge and a bit irritated by not having more to go on.

"Starting from scratch," according to our modern Delphic oracle, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, means starting "from a position of no advantage, knowledge, or influence." One presumes nothing. The parable of reading I have just offered represents my initial and indirect response to a basic question: in dealing with language and literature, can we rely on any fundamental point of view or common procedure that will allow the parts of the work and the parts of our reading to cohere? My parable gives an awkward answer: the best we can and should do is to begin by reading the passage or the work in as responsive and as unprejudiced a manner as possible. Start from scratch. Coherence may or may not emerge as we proceed.

There are, of course, many competing answers about coherence and even about whether it should be our goal. Traditionally, three major forms of coherence have been employed in the criticism and teaching of literature. First of all, the notion of unity. The quality of forming one whole has taken many forms: unities of action, of time and place, of character, of genre and tone, and many more. Dr. Johnson felt he had to justify Shakespeare's neglect of the classical unities. The Romantics reveled in overthrowing those unities, particularly the unities of tone and genre. Victor Hugo found exceptional merit in combining the sublime and the grotesque, high and low.

A second traditional form of coherence is supposed to reside in an author's style. The singleness and uniqueness of an author's mind will manifest itself in a recognizable style that may be imitated and parodied but is difficult to forge. Genius leaves its characteristic marks, which a keen observer can assemble as the identity of an individual artist. In painting, the authentication is called connoisseurship.

Thirdly, we acknowledge historic periods as producing a kind of coherence, a period style, as in an era like the Italian Renaissance, or even the American Renaissance. For reasons of convenience and intellectual

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association, we tend to study such periods as a form of unity, a Zeitgeist.

The potential unities of a work, of an author's style, and of a historic period—these are still valid and pedagogically effective means of laying out a curriculum and of approaching literary studies. They should not be junked in the rush of competing doctrines. For in the past twenty-five years or so, a new set of categories for literary study has tried to usurp the three traditional forms of coherence. The accepted metaphor for this modification is "redrawing the boundaries," and a recent book bearing that title (edited by Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn, 1992) carries the subtitle *The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies.* This book and the rearrangement of literary studies it describes offer advanced students of literature not so much a sense of coherence and unity as an insistence on proliferating variety. After six preliminary chapters, the potential scholar and critic encounters fifteen chapters that present an extensive tool kit of approaches and methods and paradigms. You have probably heard the list: modern and postmodern studies; Marxist studies; psychoanalytic studies; feminist criticism; gender and queer studies; African American, minority, and other ethnic studies; structuralism and post-structuralism; deconstruction; cultural studies; postcolonial studies. They answer to many names.

Now there are two ways the tool kit can be put to use. The student-critic reads a work and eventually decides which tool or tools to choose in order to help explain and interpret it. Or the student-critic comes to prefer one of the tools, keeps it in hand, and tends to look for pieces of writing that the tool will fit and open up. In practice, the tool kit of critical approaches provided by the redrawn boundaries is rarely used in the first way, as an array of devices to be used as called for. Most graduates of literature programs tend or are persuaded to choose one or two tools as most suited to their temperaments and to their convictions about the world. From then on, literary works are expected to lend themselves to the critical tool they have selected. In its most developed stage, this redrawing of the boundaries allows a scholar-critic to claim that one size fits all. You are a postcolonialist or a deconstructionist before you are a Renaissance scholar or a devotee of George Eliot. If you are holding a stout hammer, everything starts to look like a nail.

We should hardly be surprised that a useful term already exists for the distortion to which such a narrowed outlook may lead. In the nineteenth century, the word *exegesis,* designating scriptural interpretation, called forth its evident and logical opposite, *eisegesis.* It means "the interpretation of a word or passage by reading into it one's ideas" (*OED*). Psychology would call it projection. The popular doctrine of the social construction of reality represents a systematic embrace of eisegesis as a method.

My initial parable of reading an unidentified page is intended to

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demonstrate that when we set about the most basic tasks of reading, no single existing paradigm or procedure necessarily presents itself to make all the parts of our response cohere. The first stage of linguistic decoding happens very fast, automatically, unconsciously. We parse and construe the sentences into a message. We often wish to slow down and reexamine the decoding when reading a poem or a difficult piece of prose. Only at a point far along in the process of assembling sentences and paragraphs into some conjectured literary unity and meaning should we be nudged by the work itself to adopt a particular approach or tool—feminist, cultural, queer, deconstructionist. And in many cases, no existing method will fit, or fit for long. I have spent many years of my life reading and rereading an author who was unquestionably bourgeois, half-Jewish, and homosexual. I have learned that to apply a priori to Marcel Proust's long novel a Marxist, or an ethnic, or a queer "methodology" blinds one to the scope of his narrative and of his sensibility.

How then shall we proceed? I suggest that we defer as long as possible the stage of interpretation and that we find the patience to stay longer with the complex operation of reading, of construing the words actually there on the page, of finding the literal meaning. Starting from scratch this way allows us to revive some long-neglected practices. One of the simplest aids to grasping, for example, a difficult passage from *Finnegans Wake* or a poem by Hopkins is simply to copy it, phrase by phrase, longhand, so that every letter and dash claims its place. The paucity of textbooks in grade schools before 1900 required that all passages for study be copied, often from dictation.

Then comes reading aloud. In order to find appropriate intonation and emphasis, one must grasp the full sense of a passage. Expressive oral performance provides a certification of one's understanding at all levels, from the most elementary to the most subtle. Twenty years ago I wrote a manifesto to this effect called "How to Rescue Literature" (collected in *The Innocent Eye*, 1984). Today I stand by what I say there about reading and teaching literature.

Several other exercises belong to this enlarged domain of basic reading. Both for one's own benefit and for comparison with others' responses in a classroom, one does well to write a synopsis or paraphrase of the passage or work under consideration. The condensed version will never substitute for the original. But the process of articulating the essential movement of thought helps to reveal the shape and substance of what one is reading. And comparison of different paraphrases brings out aspects of a work usually not seen by a single reader.

Other basic exercises include learning by heart, parody, and stylistic and linguistic translation. It has taken me forty-plus years of teaching to discover that the best way for me to begin a literature course,

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undergraduate or graduate, is to have the students copy a passage (or take it from dictation), read it aloud, paraphrase it, and then read the paraphrase aloud. And I often start with an unidentified passage. You have just been subjected to that treatment. Later on in a course, we go back to reading aloud and paraphrasing at frequent intervals in order to make sure we are not wandering too far from the copy as written.

My response to the theme of coherence in literature lies right here. Let us practice, without shame and without awkwardness, the most elementary operations of reading. They will guide us toward sound exegesis and steer us away from the pitfalls of eisegesis, pitfalls created by "methodologies" and specialized approaches.

You may have surmised that my own introduction to literary study as an undergraduate came in the 1940s under the auspices of what is called the New Criticism. In my freshman English course we used Brooks and Warren's *Understanding Poetry*. But the kind of close reading I am advocating today differs markedly from what we did in that course. We never wrote a paraphrase, and we rarely read aloud. And I now wince at the alacrity with which we accepted the "fallacies" we were taught. In the forties, there was no recognized domain of literary theory. The first major contribution, Wellek and Warren's *Theory of Literature*, appeared only in 1949. Systematic thinking about literature as a category reached us undergraduates in the form of fallacies, designating evil practices we were to avoid at all costs. A few of these fallacies have survived and may be familiar to you: the intentional fallacy, the paraphrastic fallacy, the affective fallacy. But the New Critics were blind in precisely these spots. The author's intention provides one important reference point in any intelligent reading. I have already touched on the contributions of paraphrase. And the affective fallacy refers to judging a work by the physical responses it stimulates, such as laughter, tears, the frisson, sexual arousal, and the like. These responses do not represent the most trustworthy indices of literary value and power. But we should not dismiss them as extraneous to literature by rolling them into a fallacy. Emily Dickinson recognized the significance of "affects" when she declared that a good poem took the top of her head off.

Much of what I am saying runs parallel to the kind of close reading Paul de Man recommended many years ago in "Resistance to Theory." The title of his companion essay pleases me greatly: "The Return to Philology." When asked what kind of training I had in literature, I like to say that I trained as a journalist and a philologist—the latter meaning simply lover of language, as a philosopher is a lover of wisdom. The best literary philologist, however, is not de Man with his clotted style and his aversion to the very category of literature, but Leo Spitzer. In the title essay of *Linguistics and Literary History* (1948), Spitzer describes his unsophisticated approach to a literary work. One reads over and over until

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some detail—word usage, rhythm, grammatical form, omission—strikes one as significant. It may well yield a clue to a larger understanding of the work. One waits for the words to reveal a point of entry, a blaze on a tree, which one hopes will lead to exegesis, not eisegesis.

Having started from scratch and read as untendentiously as possible, following the direction in which the words seem to lead us, where shall we proceed in our pursuit of literature? Here, the setting in which reading takes place makes a large difference. To read a book alone at home, outside any course of study, does not necessarily lead to careful analysis and long pondering. Unless the book has marked us deeply, we pass on easily to something else. And many people resist the prospect of having to articulate a response to a book or to a movie just seen. Discussion and probing into motives and characters and consequences may violate the privacy of the experience elicited by reading or viewing. I say this with some confidence both because of my experience as a teacher and because two of my four children—long since adults and parents—take pleasure in talking about a book or movie we have all read or seen. The other two offspring do not participate willingly in such a discussion except to clarify some specific factual item of the plot. They do not wish to investigate their intimate relation to a set of words in a book or a series of images on the screen ("Don't bug me with your interpretations").

In a college setting, however, we increasingly expect students to look beyond the externals of a book for its basic elements of literal meaning—argument, plot, character, setting. The conventions of a classroom or a seminar room promote the communication of one's responses and interpretations in order to compare them with others'. Such discussions, at levels from the most elementary to the most refined, tend to enlarge the understanding of everyone in the group, including the teacher. Here lies one of the basic rewards of teaching as a profession. What kind of interpretation and comment might represent the ideal activity toward which our teaching could gently and circuitously find its way? Should we even try to imagine such an ideal, when there are so many different directions in which literature leads us and into which we wish it to lead us?

A few years ago a curator at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C., wrote to ask if I would talk to an informal group of curators and museum personnel in the area. After three years of steady reading with biweekly discussion meetings, they were finishing the last volume of *In Search of Lost Time.* They could offer me no fee, only a home-cooked dinner and an evening's exchange among readers who had sustained their devotion to a single work across three years. They were all women, ranging in age from their twenties to their seventies. Eleven had started the great expedition; seven had stayed the course. The years had brought the births of two children, one death, two marriages, and one divorce. The forces of life

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seemed to be winning in a suitably Proustian fashion. No other scholar or critic had talked to them. I found the invitation irresistible.

The delicious collaborative dinner concluded, instead of starting, with madeleines. My hosts did not hide how close they had come several times to abandoning their project, and how elated they now felt about having followed Marcel all the way to his final description of the duc de Guermantes balanced precariously on the tall stilts of Time. I said a few words about how Proust had slowly overcome the objection, or prejudice, I nurse against any novel whose subject is writing a novel. Several questions touched on specific details of chronology, mixed motivation, and ambiguous evidence. We discussed the character of the grandmother and the gradually accumulating experience of Time, like a cathedral being built, like a coral reef growing. And then, with a sense of inevitability and appropriateness, we stopped talking about the novel and agreed to take turns reading the first and the last half-dozen pages aloud. During the closing section, each reader murmured a few elliptical comments about the immense load of earlier incident being summoned and sifted and shifted like fairy dust. At the end of Proust's novel, the tide is not going out; it is coming in.

At the close of our extended after-dinner session of oral reading, there transpired what we call a perfect tribute: the silence of recognizing a literary experience more fully shared that evening than ordinary living usually allows to us, even with family members and co-workers. A work of literature permits such sharing because novels and poems and plays can be more transparent than our own lives. In the silence, we compared our thoughts and feelings with the panoply of lives Proust had created out of language. Commentary, interpretation, and theory were left behind in an intimacy of mutual self-recognition as both mortal and, ever so slightly, illuminated. It took three years of preparation to bring about that singular occasion in a Washington living room.

Such a culmination of reading literature in the tribute of silence is rare. In college or university courses, today restricted to the confines of one semester, it is very hard to deal with a work of epic length like those of Proust or Dante or Milton. But shorter works, sympathetically discussed without converting them into doctrine, can also afford a complete literary experience whose impact on us is certified by a collective reading. Adequately prepared, such a reading puts a provisional end to further interpretation and brings the rewards of performance.

Believing as I do in a wide spectrum of literary effects and affects, from the physical to the intellectually sophisticated, I feel a great discouragement about the way many students are now being encouraged to approach literature. The introduction to *Redrawing the Boundaries,* by Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn, synthesizes in a few pages attitudes

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toward literature that are now widely recommended. First, the authors discourage close reading of works of literature: "The technique of close reading that was yoked to the service of the larger enterprise [of literary study] has also begun to recede." The paragraph from which I draw that quotation implies that close reading will be replaced by the pursuit of professional specialities and subspecialities in close competition with one another.

Second, the authors are less concerned with literature than with linguistics and culture:

> What was once conceived of as a "work" is now, in most fields of literary scholarship, construed as a "text," and this critical shift of focus from forms of the signified to processes of signification has raised serious questions about a number of other widely accepted interpretive conventions.

The chief example of an interpretive convention now seen by Greenblatt and Gunn as overthrown is the notion than an individual author is more responsible for producing a work than the language, the context, or the culture. The "death of the author" is taken for granted.

But let us look more carefully at part of the sentence just quoted. "This critical shift from the forms of the signified to processes of signification. . . ." What is that all about? Up-to-date students of literature are supposed to grasp such terms immediately. The authors supply no explanation. I feel I must do so. Following the linguist Saussure's reductive terminology, "forms of the signified" designates the thoughts going through our heads as we read a book, thoughts presumably to be assembled into the phenomenon of literature. According to Greenblatt and Gunn, this incipient literary experience must now be set aside for a separate, higher-level "process of signification"—the philosophical, psycholinguistic domain of semiotics. Well, yes, why not, if that is what you paid your tuition for. But in a literature class devoted, say, to a reading of Tolstoy's *Death of Ivan Ilych*, one will begin to grasp the intense light imagery at the end not by concentrating on an abstract "process of signification" but by examining Tolstoy's words on the page. And all this talk of signifying, anchored in Saussure's linguistics, calmly omits the most important part of the literary phenomenon: its reference to the real world we live in. When the disciplines of higher learning eliminate that world, they have retreated to Swift's land of Laputa, an eighteenth-century spaceship hovering above the Earth and occupied by stumbling, walleyed scholars who have lost touch with reality.

Third, having set aside close reading and affirmed the independence of a "text" from reference to the real world, Greenblatt and Gunn go on to claim: "the objects of [literary] study are largely constituted by the terms in which we study them." In other words, we construct the world

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and the books in it according to the methods we use to interpret them—a new regime of eisegesis. Are the authors saying that we are free to read any way we wish? No, not really. We cannot have that kind of freedom. The professional troops have already been mustered and will not leave us in peace with our work of literature or our text of signification. Their mission has been formulated and assigned. "Each branch of literary study is inherently ambitious, eager to advance its sphere of influence . . . [to] the furthest point to which [it] can push [its] forces, extend [its] influence." For Greenblatt and Gunn, we do not have at our disposition an array of approaches and methods to be employed (often best in combination) according to how well they illuminate a work of literature. We have, instead, warring armies striving to drive out the competition and establish their own sphere of influence. This language of imperialism and conquest transforms literary study into a power struggle tending toward domination by one group or sect.

The editors of *Redrawing the Boundaries* confront us finally with a choice. If we read "texts" as trophies to capture in order to win a protracted professional power struggle, we end up with warring factions as welcomed by Greenblatt and Gunn. I feel uneasy with this extension of the adversarial system of the courts, politics, and the marketplace into literary studies. If, on the other hand, one reads books in order to gain an understanding of literature as it relates to life, then I believe we can return to the metaphor of the tool kit, where there need be no war between the tools or the users of those tools. And we can return also to the peaceful scene of reading a passage blind—blind, that is, to immediate identifying marks like author or period, but with our literary eyes and ears open to every glimmer and whisper in the words themselves.

I have an island in the palm of my right hand . . .
—Katharine Butler Hathaway
The Little Locksmith (1943)

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Fire

EDWARD HOAGLAND

Like many little kids in New York City, I wanted to be a fireman. Their daring and flair in swerving those big, red, two-section, unmufflered ladder rigs around the crosstown corners with sirens wailing—and wearing black rubber slickers and high boots with the tops folded dashingly down, plus rakish helmets, brimmed front and back to deflect a shower of sparks or a cascade of water—pierced the aplomb of an eight-year-old who wanted to ride places on a running board the way they did, anyhow. Then, when they reached the tumultuous scene of the blaze, they would hustle to unspool their jumbo hoses and tap into the bottled-up pressure of the nearest hydrant, while a white-helmeted captain directed the operation. He superseded any police officer (who seemed like a mere martinet by comparison), or even the ambulance team, because it was the firemen who ran up the extendable ladder to get to the giddy height of the rooftop and chop holes in it, or darted inside the burning building and hauled out panic-stricken people, using the Fireman's Carry. We tried this at recess ourselves, slinging a lighter child over one shoulder like a victim who had passed out from inhaling the smoke.

Fire is nature as physics, however, and during my teens—growing up now in the country—nature as empathy and intuition appealed to me more: like how to coax a reluctant box turtle to adjust to captivity and eat slugs as enthusiastically as if she were still out-of-doors, or how to distinguish an elk's from a coyote's bark. By twenty, I'd been in Wyoming as well as the Connecticut woods, had also worked in a circus menagerie, and become a sort of all-around "Nature Boy," in the words of a song that

Edward Hoagland's books include *African Calliope, Balancing Acts,* and *Tigers & Ice.* His memoir, *Compass Points,* will be published by Pantheon in February.

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was popular half a century ago. Live things were my focus and wild places intrigued me more than heroism by the time I found myself actually fighting fires. These were forest fires, in the Laguna Mountains behind San Diego, during the summer of 1953, and ordinarily no human lives besides ours were at risk, so we weren't expected to be preternaturally brave. Instead, equanimity and equilibrium were needed in the face of a conflagration, though I did see an occasional eight-year-old boy gazing with rapturous admiration out the window of some rubbernecker's car as our Forest Service "Hotshot" crew left the road and hiked into a fire zone.

I wanted to learn if my New England woods had instilled enough savvy in me that these big California fires in the wilds, too, were something I already knew. Though not playful or fond, a forest fire is of the earth and acts with about as much rhythm and logic as a big cat, perhaps: given the wind, humidity, and ground cover as defining factors. It certainly knows what it's already burned. "Run into the black, not into the green, if you are trapped" was almost the first warning our instructors gave us: or (as with an angry bear) go downhill, not up, where the fire can tirelessly leap. But better not to *have* to run. That's what our mattocks, brush hooks, shovels, and Pulaskis were for—cutting siege lines down to bare mineral sand, rock, or soil containing nothing organic for fuel.

Our camp was up in a pine forest just below the spine of the Coast Range that caught the cloud banks blowing off the Pacific and wrung the last wet mists and rains out of them before a stingy remnant blew east over the sudden desert and the saline Salton Sea, thirty miles long, glittering and evaporating far below us in the direction of Arizona. In the evening I liked to climb up to this knife-edge watershed, marveling at how pine-needle soil changed to desiccated sand right over the hump, in a matter of a few hundred yards, and on my days off would hike for many miles down canyon tracks below the forest out toward the Pacific Ocean side, talking a little to ranchers and hermits and looking for mountain-lion sign. We were a miscellaneous crew of older dropouts and kids from Escondido or El Cajon, riding around to lightning strikes in a stake-sided truck and trained by a couple of clean-cut young Forest Service pros who were pleasingly cautious about endangering our lives.

The fires crawled through the manzanita and chaparral in hundred-degree heat, nourished by every fitful breeze and patch of tinder. We'd have a bulldozer to help us after the first few hours, like a tank leading a platoon of infantry, but still needed to kill sparks with our shovels and bang at the hot spots spontaneously regenerating behind it. Tanker planes flew over, dropping water on some of the worst flare-ups to flatten them. We wore bandannas over our noses like bandits in the smoke, and watched the fire rear up in a creeping wall thirty feet high, then grow

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arms like an octopus when the wind whooshed through a gap. It roared, crackled, and pawed, mastering the terrain.

A big fire was divided into sectors. State crews and prison crews fought it along with us. And there were stages to an aggressive blaze—the campfire that had got out of hand as a tentative beginning, modestly clothing itself in brush until an explosion of fuel gave it red legs. You drove toward it on a radio report from the man or woman in a tower on a mountaintop, finally spotting a spiral of gray smoke, faint and slow. What sort of country was it in? How to get there from the truck? Then the spiral plumed, widened, and darkened. A snaky flame climbing a dry copse of trees looked almost ornamental at first, as though decorating them with red flowers, oddly festive and ribbony as you wound toward where it was. A primitive part of you maybe rooted for it, grasping for food and footing, at the same time that you wanted to get there quicker to put it out. Gray smoke, blackening, kindling, hid the reds and yellows subversively, as though they weren't getting brighter. You wanted to hurry; you wanted to come in on a forward side, not be left behind, fighting to save vegetation that had already been abandoned by the fire unscathed—but not right to its leeward where the wind might burn you up or cut the calculation too thin.

Because our bunkhouse was on the heights, we generally approached these fires from above, though after an hour's drive we might have to climb up from a dry creekbed again on foot, depending on how close the truck could get. The smoke smudged wider than we could keep a picture of in our mind's eye as the fire grew businesslike, not flickering as much as grim, and wrapped itself in the trappings of a natural disaster—the freight-train roar when the prevailing wind gusted as fast as a horse for a couple of minutes, and the cruel-sounding crunch as shrubs and thickets died and hardscrabble trees were scorched. When the destruction became wholesale—though we were only chopping at a corner of the flank—our young foreman got on his radio to coordinate a line of attack with a prospective path of flight if the wind unexpectedly spun partway around to menace us. We focused on the immediate theater of fire that was in sight (it *was* a theater), and paced our endurance to the labor of chopping brush and throwing it aside, as well as the furnace heat, breathing carefully in the smoke and hoarding a reserve of energy for moving fast if we had to. We drew some confidence from each other's stolid alacrity and the cage that the wind built to herd as well as speed the fire, muzzling, steering it. Its noise absorbed our nervous impulse to make much conversation. And fighting the flames, one ceased to notice their beauty. They were instead a chaos of incineration, sometimes fluctuating as red striations in the smoke, but grinding on. Your canvas-covered, one-gallon canteen, indented to fit across a hip, was what your thoughts

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strayed to, plus the eating-oranges stowed in your pack for a last supply of fluid.

I don't remember the men I worked with in any detail, but we were all good soldiers, stretching our strength, taking the endeavor very seriously. At night we'd camp on a gravelly riverbottom, eat steak, tank up on cowboy coffee and soda, and watch the fire burn up-slope from where we were, although slowing as the evening cooled. The California forestry crews, and the state prisoners and federal trusties, both guarded, were camped separately within sight of us but at a remove. In a national forest, we didn't have the anguish of people's houses burning up, and it was a dryish place so we didn't see a lot of trapped wildlife. Hawks swooped to grab the wood rats and ground squirrels in front of the grassier conflagrations, and vultures sailed into the blackened area after the fire passed. We felt considerable comradeship, as in my army training at Fort Dix two years later; you don't dump a friend or scant an officer's judgment lightly after that. But to defeat a forest fire is not like George Patton against Erwin Rommel. It's nature reenacting an ancient form of physics that you employ a sort of jiujitsu to cut short. Feed it bare ground, chop and scrape a fire line: minerals against fire. Then we might sit whole days, each of us in a scrap of shade under a boulder, watching for breakouts after the blaze was supine. The sun in August seemed in cahoots with the fire, enabling it to flicker and flare up, or fingeringly smoke at twenty points again. And we would check the whimsy of the wind as often as any primeval hunter. Nature might slip its collar and make a run for it—new smoke could put us flat on our stomachs on the ground, sucking air.

The wind could kill or save us, and the heat reminded us that the earth is molten inside anyway if you dig far enough. Leaping the crackling treetops, masticating branches at an acre a minute, a fire is like a hurricane, and you can't stop it by meticulously depriving it of food, deflating it like a dragon, if the wind doesn't consent, but gooses it right past the skirmish line. The air is acrid, the flames gain territory, presenting a new reality as you duck for cover to windward, and will burn up yet another slope all night long, before a rain squall from the ocean finally hits them on the crest and the bulldozers and a couple of tanker planes come in again, until at last they gutter out.

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Synagogues

On Being a Believing Nonbeliever

LEONARD KRIEGEL

May the taste of honey linger
Under the bitterest tongue.
—Adrienne Rich,
"At the Jewish New Year"

I was born on May 25, 1933—as propitious a date as any future American essayist could hope for. The greatest of our essayists, Emerson, was also born on May 25, though his arrival preceded mine by some one hundred and thirty years. I have no idea what, if anything, young Emerson was told by his mother about the day of his birth. My mother, however, never tired of telling her firstborn that his entrance into the world had been impressive. Pulling me from her womb like a loaf of bread from the oven, Dr. Samuel Greenstein had triumphantly stamped me "another Jack Dempsey!" Or so my mother liked to recall, beaming proudly. Largeness in infants was still considered an asset in 1933—and I was not only large but, according to my mother, as content and placid an infant as Dr. Greenstein had ever brought into this world. I have no choice but to accept my mother's word for it, yet I prefer to think of that natal placidity as a mask adopted to face a turbulent world and a violent century. Born into a nation ravaged by the Depression, I entered a time in which Hitler was solidifying power in Germany, Stalin was cementing control of the Soviet Union with the murder of millions of kulaks and the ruthless suppression of dissent, and Japan was preparing to invade China.

I was not destined to become one of those stratospherically-high-IQ children who seemed as numerous in the Bronx of my childhood as the heaps of fallen chestnuts I remember beneath the trees of Van Cortlandt

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Park. But I was smart enough to hunt for cover from the start. No one born in 1933 would speak of the last sixty-seven years as uneventful. Yet what television anchors like to call "the passage of time" seems distant and boring today. Events I once thought momentous no longer seem meaningful; events I once dismissed as minor now loom in my mind like giant boulders.

As I drift into what gerontologists call "young old age" (a reminder of how humorous a language English is), I no longer ask memory to verify my life. I am satisfied when it is able to show me how a boy's future turned into a man's past. Yet I find it increasingly unsettling that the past that shaped me is now the future I have lived through. For the past still stabs at me with its dates—December 7, 1941; June 6, 1944; April 12, 1945—even as it quickens dreams and resurrects consciousness. Great events now find meaning only when linked to personal details—the initiation into sex, say, or the moment I first recognized the power of money. In the Pathé newsreel flickering through my mind, I watch a nine-year-old boy roam the empty lots of the Bronx in 1942, collecting tinfoil and scrap iron for "the war effort"—and I want to warn him that what he is doing has nothing to do with the war effort, that it is simply a moment fixed in time, nothing more. On the History Channel, I see the murder of JFK (who casts a smaller shadow than he did on that sunny Friday afternoon in November 1963) for the hundredth time. But I no longer feel the dread I felt that fall afternoon. Instead, I want to hold my infant son in my arms, as I remember doing when Jack Ruby gunned down Lee Harvey Oswald before the eyes of an entire nation. I want to assure my son that he will have his future. But that infant is now awaiting the birth of his own firstborn, and has memories of his own to decipher.

As I age, I discover that I do not wish to assess the past century or defend its dead. Man or woman, Caesar or commoner, I am content to leave all such tasks to historians and biographers, satisfied merely to be one of six billion members of a species conscious of time's passing and its own vulnerability. Like one of my early literary heroes, Saul Bellow's Augie March, I am willing to take advantage of opportunity's knock. For like Augie, I am an American man. And for American men, whether Bronx-born or Chicago-born, vulnerability has become as hot as the NASDAQ. Old photos, scrapbooks, newspaper clippings, a *Book of Wonder* from 1939 pried out of the refuse of a dead uncle's closet—these contain notes enough for the future as past, goads for the restlessness unleashed by memory. And I am one American man willing to live with those notes.

Not long ago I received another such goad—one that jarred not only memory but also my sense of the man and boy I had been. Neither faded photo nor yellowed newspaper clipping nor worn book from childhood, this slice of my past took the form of a letter. It wasn't even a personal

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letter, though its effect was painfully personal. "Dear Friend," followed by a comma instead of a colon, is what I expect of solicitations from National Public Radio or the American Cancer Society or a bank in Delaware imploring me to sign up for a credit card I do not need and will not use. But this was no plea for funds or reminder of charitable obligations or guarantee of the lowest interest rate VISA allows. It was a death notice, and it invited me to cannibalize a past bound to a neighborhood in which I had spent my childhood, adolescence, and early manhood.

In July 1937, when I was four, I moved with my parents (my mother was pregnant with my brother at the time) to what New York City guidebooks refer to as the Norwood area of the Bronx. Except for two years in a state rehabilitation hospital after I took sick with polio in July 1944, I lived in that working- and lower-middle-class neighborhood until I married and moved to Manhattan's Chelsea area in 1957. The Chelsea to which my wife and I moved had seen better days by 1957, yet over the past decade it has been transformed into a real estate marketer's dream, trendy even if measured against other sectors of Rudy Giuliani's trendy city. When my wife and I settled in Chelsea, she was twenty-three, I was twenty-four. Two-thirds of our lives, forty-two years, have been lived here—our entire life together, other than the three years we lived in Europe. Our sons were born and raised here, and each has returned to make Chelsea his adult home.

Yet when I use the term *home* I am not speaking of the spacious apartment we have occupied since 1970. Home for me remains the cramped one-bedroom apartment I shared with brother and parents in a building and street defined by numbers that was part of a neighborhood defined by a name that no one who lived in that neighborhood had heard of. At 315 East 206th Street in the Norwood section of the Bronx, I would discover my version of the *shtetl* my parents called *der heym.* To my surprise, I also discovered that I lived inside the same psychological boundaries that Eastern European Jews like my parents knew as "the old country." In the landscape of emotion, the old country can just as easily be a rock-strewn Sicilian village or small town in southwest Arkansas with the improbable name of Hamburg as a Yiddish-speaking *shtetl* in Poland. Where the old country exists means little. That it is where conscience and consciousness were shaped means everything. And the heart and soul of my old country was the Mosholu Jewish Center, a synagogue that stood at 3044 Hull Avenue in the Bronx.

The mimeographed letter announcing its death was not notable for style. Molière's bourgeois gentleman was not alone in being thrilled to discover that he spoke in prose. Yet whatever it lacked in rhetorical flourish, that letter gripped me from the start. Even having enough time to

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reread Proust (as good an argument as I can think of for retiring from teaching) would not jolt memory with as powerful a sense of reaching back into that time when the self and its world were formed.

MOSHOLU JEWISH CENTER
3044 Hull Avenue, Bronx, NY 10467-4604 (718) 547-1515

November 9, 1998

Dear Friend,

I truly regret to inform you that our beloved Mosholu Jewish Center is about to close its doors. The demographic changes in our neighborhood have been devastating and our congregation has simply dissolved.

Our records indicate that names of your departed loved ones are inscribed on the Memorial Tablets in our Sanctuary. If you wish to retrieve these tablets, please call our office or, if there is no answer, please try our super Ariel at 718-547-1516. Please tell him when you can come and he will be available to remove your tablets from the wall and give them to you.

Again, I am truly sorry. Please accept my warmest good wishes to you and all your dear ones.

Sincerely yours,
ARTHUR PERMISON
President

The body transmits the self through time, but memory transmits the body through the rituals of its aging. If our senses define consciousness, memories of the body define what our senses do with that consciousness. We see ourselves not as we are, or even as we were, but as places in the mind resurrect us—places restructured by imagination. The Mosholu Jewish Center (or MJC, as we boys called it, like some secret club into which only initiates possessed entry) had a Moorish façade. But it wasn't architectural style that makes the MJC stand like a rock in memory. Other synagogues built in New York during the 1920s also had a touch of the Arabian Nights in their architecture. In the pre-war Bronx, Moorish synagogues competed for attention with apartment houses flaunting Elizabethan façades. The entire borough boasted a remarkably playful architecture. I could walk through a courtyard in which fat goldfish swam in a whitewashed concrete fountain, only to enter a lobby festooned with medieval battle flags that would have done Hollywood proud. Nor does memory of the stained-glass window fronting Hull Avenue evoke the synagogue's power. If anything, its depiction of the world at creation was curiously un-Jewish, rays of purple and gold embracing mythic error like the horns on the head of Michelangelo's Moses. In the anything-goes

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architectural style of the Bronx, that window simply seemed as natural as the Moorish façade.

Whatever the reason, I loved the synagogue from the moment my father took me by the hand to register me for its Talmud Torah. My father expected me to be a *chaida bocher* for the simple reason that he had been a *chaida bocher* in Ottonyier in the old country. Maybe that explains why, when I pull the MJC from memory, I embrace not its stone and brick and stained-glass window but the boy and man I was. To ask God's house to confirm one's singularity is beyond ordinary vanity. Yet there is a chronology to the creation of one's sense of self—and for me that chronology can be measured by my relationship to the synagogue. I was eight the afternoon my father registered me for *chaida.* I was eleven the summer polio struck and *chaida* days ended. I was thirteen on that blistering August day in 1946 when I returned to 206th Street from two years in the superbly named New York State Reconstruction Home. I was fourteen when I walked the five blocks from the apartment on 206th Street to the synagogue to join my father and brother in worship of a God whose existence I had begun to doubt during my two years in the hospital. With prostheses strapped to my legs and crutches thrust beneath my shoulders, I observed the High Holy Days of 1947 still fantasizing a miraculous cure that would let me play baseball again. Yet I already knew that my father's God was not going to give me back legs that worked as legs were supposed to do. Nonetheless, I walked to the synagogue and pulled my brace-bound body up the stairs to the sanctuary, and stood with my father and brother to praise the eternal glory of a divinity who was markedly indifferent to my loss.

I again walked up those stairs ten years later. At twenty-four, I pushed my body forward on the muscular shoulders of a cripple who lifted weights and read too many books and raged against the reality that he was, powerful torso and all, still a cripple. I walked down the carpeted aisle on my braces and crutches and stood beneath the *chuppah* with the woman I loved and listened to the rabbi invoke the marriage ceremony. When he offered the traditional blessing, I could think only of whether my brace-bound foot would break the wineglass at ceremony's end (Harriet and I were already husband and wife, having eloped a week earlier to Yonkers, where a smiling justice of the peace had sanctioned our union on behalf of the State of New York. Hearing of our marriage, her parents said *Kaddish,* the Hebrew prayer for the dead, as revenge upon a daughter who had committed the sin of marrying a cripple. That somehow made it important even for the avowed agnostic I by then claimed to be to ask a God he did not believe in to sanctify his marriage.) I was thirty-seven when I sat with my sons, then eight and four, and their grandfather to welcome in a new year granted us by that same God, with whom I now passionately argued. Six

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years later, accompanied by my brother, I walked into that sanctuary for the last time. In one of the few places in America that had been an anchor of stability for Fred Kriegel, his American sons said *Kaddish* for their now-dead and still-foreign father.

It was an unusually warm April day in 1976, and it was already difficult to ignore the "changes" that letter spoke of twenty years later. Not that they were "devastating." Hull Avenue looked no seedier than it had when I was a child. The faces in the streets were darker but not poorer. But the men (I remember no women in the congregation on the mornings Abe and I said *Kaddish*) we joined in prayer seemed, like the synagogue itself, old and withered. The stained-glass creation scene now looked like the work of a 1930s Soviet artisan, apparatchik kitsch created by someone unable to comprehend the glory of a God whose awesome presence he was expected to capture in glass. The *bimah* and the brass lamp above the pulpit and the velvet covers of the Torah scrolls seemed worn, tacky. My father had died four days before Passover. Since we Jews were forbidden to mourn during our festivals, the usual week of sitting *shivah* would be cut short. As I gazed around at that aging congregation, I felt grateful for that one small gift. I did not want to return to the MJC.

Yet saying *Kaddish* for my father did not sever my connection with the synagogue, even if it was the last time I set foot inside the sanctuary. My mother and uncle remained in the neighborhood until their deaths in 1987 and 1989, and I would drive there every other week or so to help them deal with the problems of growing old in an America in which aging was an even greater sin than marrying a cripple. Occasionally, not knowing how I got there, I would find myself parked before the synagogue, four blocks south of where my uncle and mother lived in the apartment that had once held my three cousins, grandmother, two uncles, mother, father, brother, and me. I would sit in front of the synagogue as if an invisible hand held me there against my will. Walking on braces and crutches was difficult by then and I had taken to using a wheelchair. Unable to walk up stairs, I envisioned how the sanctuary had looked at different times in my life. Had I still been able to walk up stairs, I doubt that I would have gotten out of my car. It was enough to stare at the stained-glass window, playing light and shadow in imagination as I played them in the museum. A spiritual chiaroscuro mesmerized my visions of the self in its time as I sat in my car and remembered.

Even a photograph conceived by imagination, no matter how distorted, nags at memory. In front of those two stone steps leading into the synagogue I had fought alongside my friend Stanley with three boys who insisted that we had killed Christ. At ten, I wasn't particularly interested in Christ or deicide. But Stanley and I held our own until our teacher, Mr.

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Danzig, rushed out of the MJC, long ruler in hand, and the boys fled. Fights among boys are usually quixotic, and this one could easily have been over whether Pete Reiser was as good an outfielder as the man Hemingway called "the great DiMaggio" instead of over who had killed Christ. Still, it left us feeling proud, ethnic warriors flushed with how well we had stood up for faith and tribe. Mr. Danzig, who used his ruler to rap the knuckles of any boy caught fighting, patted each of us on the back before he sent us home.

Behind the iron gates with the embossed Star of David was a small yard. The yard was at the rear of the synagogue, and a pear tree occupied its center. I loved that pear tree, convinced that God intended it to grace my life. We used to pluck its fruit, usually in defiance of Mr. Danzig, but sometimes with his grudging permission. I've never tasted sweeter pears. To this day I still think of pears as the Jewish fruit. (Does that make apples Christian, I wonder?) The Jehovah who demanded obedience had ordained pears *ours* with that tree. Yet despite my literal religiosity, before I took sick I had no illusions about the nature of the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. He was not sweet or playful, but serious and judgmental. The synagogue had been built not so that we could fight over who had killed Christ or so that we could cop pears from a tree. It had been built for the same reason synagogues had once been built in Vilna and Warsaw and Safed—to glorify God and to remind man of his place in the universe.

I began *chaida* three months before Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and the nation went to war. World War II supposedly unified the nation, but I remember its early months as a time of increasing tension in my neighborhood. In a nation classless in popular myth, tribal differences offered a none too subtle lesson on the power of religion and ethnicity. And divisions were magnified by rumors that drifted like fog through streets in which suspicion and animosity were not to dissipate until the fighting turned in favor of the Allies in 1943. For the first year of the war, the news from the front was almost uniformly bad. Hunched over the radio, I would listen to Gabriel Heatter gloomily reciting the daily tonnage sent to its Atlantic grave by Nazi U-boats or somberly pronouncing the mysterious name of a Pacific island that had succumbed to the Japanese onslaught. And if no longer an economic factor, the Depression remained a psychological one as rumors of its reemergence at war's end joined all the "others" threatening tribal allegiance.

At the MJC, tribal loyalty mixed with a sense of place. Form defined function long before I became a teacher of literature. Constructed of brick and stone, the synagogue was also built out of the same spiritual passion that had impelled belief in the singularity of that one God since Abraham cast his eyes at the stars more than five thousand years earlier.

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Before polio struck me down, I felt the enormous power of God's singularity. And why shouldn't I have? Belief is not acknowledged by magnificent structures alone. Isn't the quest to believe as evident in an amateurish painting of the Archangel Michael trumpeting the world's end in the dirt-crusted window of a storefront church in the South Bronx as in the stained-glass rose window of Chartres? Belief was mixed into the brick and mortar of the MJC, too. Despite the verbal gymnastics that allow me to speak of my lack of faith as the creed of a believing nonbeliever, it is the memory of being a believer that tempts old passions. Like a buoy marking the lost lanes of praise and adoration of a God I feared and loved, I yearn for that simplicity.

As if we were soldiers drifting home, we divide the spoils of memory with what we cull from the past. My idea of the God I do not believe in is as childish as my idea of the God I believed in with such absolute certainty during *chaida* days. I tell myself that the obligations of memory are obligations that belief is expected to renew. But memory reminds me that I fell in love not with Hebrew (a language never as holy for me as the American of Red Barber describing a game between my beloved Dodgers and the much-dreaded Cardinals) but with the sensuous turn of so ancient a script. Written Hebrew was a holy calligraphy. Three years were to pass before my mother begged for her crippled son's *refiah* from that divine calligrapher, but I still wonder whether my passion for godly lettering wasn't just another aspect of the ethnic wars that threatened me. Or did I truly believe that in the loops and curves of Hebrew I had seen the hand of God?

Before I took sick, I approached God as Jewish boys were expected to approach divinity—not with Kierkegaardian fear and trembling, but with all those obligations thrust upon me by having been born into what even my nonbeliever radical uncle called "the tribe." "Our God and God of our Fathers" was how we were taught to pray. Even children understood that those fathers were as much claimants of heart and soul as the one God. My responsibility to them was my responsibility to the past, and it inevitably collided with the life I sought in the parks and empty lots of the Bronx. When I read of how Abraham, father of the tribe, had fled the land of Ur to search for the one God, I would think of my own father, kidnapped by Cossacks at the age of twelve and forced to wander the steppes of Russia. What divine line led from Avrum in the land of Ur to Efrum in the land of Galicia? Had my father fled the sickness known as Europe to lead me by the hand to *chaida* in a plebeian corner of the Bronx where the people of the one God had built another synagogue?

That sense of continuity was a tangible physical presence in my life. Rooted to stone and brick and all the myths mixed into stone and brick, it made belief easier. Not only was the synagogue where Jews worshipped,

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it was the physical pledge God insisted upon. After I returned from my two-year stay in the hospital, I used to argue religion with my Irish Catholic friends. Arguing religion was like arguing baseball. And nothing in Christianity was as incomprehensible to me as the idea of receiving the body and blood of Christ. I could understand the Virgin Birth and accept miracles attributed to saints. When Billy Maloney insisted that Saint Brendan, not Columbus, had discovered America, I simply shrugged. If Columbus, why not Saint Brendan? But communion altered my sense of the distance between divine and human. I did not want that distance bridged even after I came to view myself as a nonbeliever. Agnostic or not, I wanted a God who was God. Why did my Irish Catholic friends need a God made flesh? Yet if they were correct and the divine presence was embodied in wafer and grape juice turned to flesh and blood, was not a God made manifest in that vividly sensuous script an even more formidable divinity?

Faith was not a rock but a moated castle before polio deprived me of it. In *chaida,* faith was anchored as much to the need for Jews to stand together as to the idea of divinity. If Judaism had a catechism, it would have read (at least for me): "He is our God, we are his people, his divinity is our destiny." But I needed no catechism to believe that God's story was my destiny. That was as evident as the superb skills of the Dodgers' Pistol Pete Reiser before he took to kissing outfield walls with his head.

Sitting in my car, staring at the increasingly drab synagogue, I sensed that the MJC had been absorbed into the inevitability of America—a process until recently known as "the melting pot." If I still view that process as not only inevitable but also desirable, that doesn't change the fact that it has come under attack over the past three decades. But it was a meaningful idea for those of us who came of age before the 1960s. Race, ethnicity, and gender claim today's America, yet nothing explains America better—or speaks more profoundly of the synagogue's doom—than the idea of the melting pot.

The children who went to *chaida* with me grew to adulthood in a nation in which the Jews became, as they had dreamed of becoming in Europe, just like everybody else. Not only were the Jews swept up by the desire to Americanize, but so were the two other large groups in the neighborhood, the Irish and the Italians. All of them were ready to flee the Bronx as the ethnic jostling characteristic of American cities since the early nineteenth century accelerated after the war. Imposing the "American way of life" by demanding that immigrants discard their non-American past would also accelerate, until the emergence of the black power movement in the 1960s sent white America on its own identity hunt. The postwar harmony among Jews, Irish, and Italians in New York's outer

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boroughs owed a good deal to the influx of Hispanics and blacks into neighborhoods that before the war had been white ethnic provinces. As the old groups prospered and departed their aging streets, new people arrived to take their place. In New York, ethnic succession was always the rule. Once the older immigrants accepted the possibility of success in America, the boundaries dividing them from each other broke down. One need simply compare the intermarriage rates among these groups in the 1930s with those in the 1960s and 1970s.

On some level, the story of the synagogue's doom was merely a variation on what was taking place throughout the nation. In California, the grandchildren of Tom Joad, no longer despised as Okies, are the most virulent opponents of new immigration into the state, particularly nonwhite immigration. In New York, a different Diaspora, spurred by success rather than persecution, sent the older ethnic groups from the Bronx to Queens—and then from Queens to Long Island or Westchester or New Jersey or into the mysterious nation west of the Hudson. My own move to Chelsea was less characteristic of the postwar Diaspora than my brother's move to Memphis. Of twenty or more cousins who lived in Brooklyn or the Bronx, only three live in the city today; one has recently returned after a thirty-year absence.

"Our congregation has simply dissolved." Adequate as explanation or as eulogy, it fails to note that the congregation dissolved into America. If in the process they surrendered a synagogue on Hull Avenue, the fact is that they had already surrendered much of what was rich in the Bronx of my childhood. From the cloud-puffed stars on the ceiling of the Loew's Paradise on Fordham Road to the ornate stone pillars of the synagogue façade, the once park-rich and architecturally playful borough grew dirty and drab. The cornerstone on which Common Era and Hebrew dates were carved, 1928 and 5688, testified to the accommodations demanded by an America that, in my grandmother's words, would "kill us with candy." It isn't necessary to add that my grandmother spoke Yiddish, a language as foreign to my sons as Sanskrit. It was not merely the death of the tribe she feared; it was also that the tribe was American enough to cooperate in that death.

From January to August 1981, I taught at a branch of the University of Paris set in the working-class suburb of Saint-Denis, as architecturally drab a city, despite its famed cathedral, as is to be found in France. The contrast between the Seventh Arrondissement in Paris, where I lived, and Saint-Denis, where I taught, was striking. Despite the triumph of François Mitterrand's socialists, Paris had never been as open to wealth and power. No people value success as much as the French do, and none enjoy the fruits of success as much as Parisians. Prosperity

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kissed the air one breathed in Paris that spring. And there, on a sunny day in April, I ran into my old friend Stanley, at whose side I had fought for the honor of that one God forty years earlier. We had not seen each other since 1957, when Stanley, like me, married and left the neighborhood. He now lived in an affluent New Jersey suburb with wife and children and was vice president of an international cosmetics firm headquartered in Paris, where he often flew on business.

We arranged to meet for dinner the following night. Because he came to the restaurant directly from a meeting, Stanley brought along his assistant, a young Frenchman. No longer in existence, the restaurant was Michelin-starred in 1981 and filled with well-dressed men and women—light years removed from a Bronx in which "eating out" meant pizza in a local Italian hole-in-the-wall or pastrami on rye at a kosher deli. Michelin-starred palaces need no laminated tables or sawdust-strewn floors. We sat around a plush velvet banquette, and a good-looking blond woman approached every fifteen minutes to offer us our choice of Cuban cigars or expensive cigarettes. Des Anges seemed permeated with wealth gracefully aging—good food, good wine, wood-paneled walls resonating with a power as inclusive as it was reassuring.

Yet Stanley and I spoke not of the charms of Paris or of what we had each accomplished since leaving the Bronx but of synagogue and neighborhood. We talked about "the old country," redefining the past until we became our parents, immigrants immersing mind and heart in *der heym.* Stanley tried to draw his assistant into the conversation, but the young man shook his head even as we renewed the neighborhood we had shared. In that posh Parisian restaurant, we resurrected Sandow & Israel's candy store on 206th and Bainbridge, and we walked once again into Larry Campbell's bar to drink our first beers. As far as that young man was concerned, we could have been talking of life on Mars. At first enthralled by memory's effect upon us, he grew increasingly irritated at the reverence in which we held the past. To him we were men of substance, yet like aging drunks at a high school reunion, we were grabbing at the past and floating its dates into the competitive air. Finally, exasperated, he cried, "But you do not even know each other any more! And these memories . . . is that all America is for you?"

Two childhood friends, grown men nearing fifty, meet by accident in Paris in April 1981. They have not seen each other since they left the neighborhood in 1957. They meet for dinner and renew an old friendship. The past frames their narration, as it did for Proust, who could have told those two aging Bronx boys that the collective past, like the individual past, imposes structure on narrative. As they speak, they become the boys they were in 1943, two *chaida bochers* fighting for the honor of God and tribe in front of the synagogue on Hull Avenue.

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For that is the baggage American men carry. We frame the self against its past in hopes of seeing the self honestly. Both synagogue and neighborhood helped make us Americans by endorsing the assimilation that those who built the synagogue feared yet hungered after. Not only did the MJC provide the one God for whom we battled; but it also provided the banner under which we would march into the temples of Baal. No museum visit stands as vividly in memory as that awe-filled afternoon I followed Mr. Danzig, along with the other boys in Hebrew school, into the Polo Grounds to see my first major league baseball game. Befuddled by a sport about which he knew nothing and cared less, Mr. Danzig bravely led us into the pagan heart of a nation he understood, despite his Columbia M.A., no better than my immigrant father had. On his face I saw the same grim determination I had seen the day he escorted us into the Mosholu Theater to watch a grainy film in which Jews on horses, rifles in hand, patrolled a kibbutz in Palestine. Necessity was justification enough in the America of 1943, a nation that possessed strategies for the making of Americans that Gertrude Stein never dreamed of.

Mr. Danzig did not intend us to succumb to the lure of dirt diamond and green grass. But what he intended was beside the point anyway, and he knew it. The pot was simmering and his students would embrace America because their parents were afraid of what might happen to them if they didn't. He feared the disappearance of our Jewish "otherness" even more than my grandmother did, but he was American enough to know that there was nothing he could do about it. Our parents had fled the old country for this golden land, and we fled Saturday morning services, invoking "our God and God of our fathers" as we ran toward whatever game we were to play in, at whatever lot or field we were to play it on. At game's end we ran home, wolfed down our cold chicken sandwiches, and then scurried off to the movies. And in the rich fat of a darkness no pharaoh feared and no vengeful Jehovah plotted, we sat with our own, each tribe flanked by another tribe—Jewish, Irish, Italian, children all, humbled by the prospect of four cartoons, a serial, the coming attractions, and two feature films. Gentile and Jew emerged four hours later, bleary-eyed, dream-emptied. America rode into our hearts on those Saturday afternoons at the movies, even as we rode into America's definition of what we were to become.

Nothing could be more American than a melting pot deemed unfashionable at the moment of its triumph. In this nation, theories that fail as history, like Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, find new life as metaphor. We children of immigrants would ransack the past to assume our American obligations. During the more than thirty years I

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taught at the City College of New York, I would often drive through Central Park to the campus in Harlem. In an image left over from a Hollywood that fed my boyhood dreams, Temple Emanu-El rose above Fifth Avenue at 66th Street like a giant stop sign. Not even the twin bronze cupolas of Central Synagogue on Lexington Avenue spoke as powerfully of the success Jews had achieved in New York. Exiting the park at 110th Street, I would head north on Lenox Avenue until stopped by the red light at 120th Street. On the northeast corner of Lenox and 120th, my eyes would search the stately neo-Roman columns of Mount Olivet Baptist Church. Built in 1908 as Temple Israel, it had housed those same German Jews whose wealth built Emanu-El in the 1920s. Like the Irish, the tribe they followed in so much else as well, the Jews left Harlem after World War I, and Temple Israel's marble sanctuary was turned into a black Baptist church embodying the same aspirations for respectability and success that would create the imposing synagogue on Fifth Avenue. The building was not significantly altered from the time when Lenox was a Jewish avenue. Four Stars of David still topped four neo-Roman columns, commanding the eye as they had when the synagogue opened its doors in 1908. At the light, I listened for different prayers, different accents, in a city that, despite its ethnic and religious shifts, seemed unchanged.

The father for whom I said *Kaddish* died four months after his first grandchild, my son Mark, read from the Torah on the last Saturday in November 1975. Mark read his Torah portion from a *bimah* hastily erected a few months earlier to serve as a sanctuary for the Brotherhood Synagogue, the same role for which the building had been created as the Quaker meetinghouse in Gramercy Park. It had served its Quaker congregation from 1859 to 1974. As Mark chanted his portion of the law in that almost-perfect nineteenth-century sanctuary which the Quakers had built out of their sense of God's simplicity, I wondered whether his grandfather understood what landmark status meant to a building or to a city. I doubt that he did. He certainly had no idea of who the Quakers were or what they believed. Like the Cossacks who had kidnapped him as a boy during the First World War, the Quakers were part of that enormous worldwide other he knew as the *goyim*. Yet like his children and grandchildren, my father had been forced to respond to an America in which a bar mitzvah was no longer a ritual acceptance of responsibility for adulthood. No one kidnapped by Cossacks at the age of twelve could believe that a middle-class American boy assumed responsibility for his own life at thirteen. But even in America, a bar mitzvah was a joining of self to tribe.

A few weeks before his death, my father spoke of how much he had liked the synagogue in which his grandson was called to the Torah. "It's a

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nice place," he said. My father's relationship to English was difficult at best, and I did not ask him to say more. He was trying to tell me that the sanctuary was self-contained yet formless, rather like that now-unfashionable melting pot. The *AIA Guide to New York City* on my desk calls it a "spartan brownstone box built for the Quakers and now used by another religious group." "It's a nice place" is as accurate as that example of architectural prose. My father felt awe in the simple sanctuary in which his grandson read from the Torah. I lack his faith, but I also felt a sense of awe in the face of that once-Quaker and now-Jewish simplicity—as I feel it now, twenty-five years later, whenever I pray to that God I claim not to believe in at the Brotherhood Synagogue.

Were he still alive, my father would find it difficult to accept the death of his synagogue in the Bronx. Not only was the Mosholu Jewish Center a source of comfort to him in a country he loved but could never understand; it was also where he went to meet his God and the God of his fathers. My father remained faithful to a God who had allowed the Holocaust, a God who could remain silent even as his mother, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and cousins were wiped from the face of this earth. My father forced himself to accept a God indifferent to his son's crippled state. But a God unable to handle "demographic changes" would have been difficult for him. He could allow God his cosmic failures, but trivial divine failures would have puzzled him just as America puzzled him. Had he known of it, my father would not have understood how Temple Israel became Mount Olivet Baptist Church. I never told him that the "nice" synagogue had once been a Quaker meetinghouse. So much of what happened to the Jews in America was beyond my father. What would he have thought of the service his agnostic son attended in Savannah, the day after his other grandson, Bruce, whose bar mitzvah he would not live to see, drove up to Hull Avenue to remove from the dying synagogue the bronze tablets memorializing the family dead? Three great-uncles, a great-aunt, the great-grandmother after whom Bruce is named, and his grandparents—one by one, Bruce unscrewed each tablet from the wall. Had he, I wondered, heard the ancestral voices I used to hear as a *chaida bocher* when I prayed to "our God and God of our fathers"?

Temple Mikve Israel in Savannah is the oldest reform synagogue still in continuous use in the nation. Its archives boast a letter from George Washington, and, according to the guides who shepherd tourists through Savannah's lovely Monterey Square, it is the only neo-Gothic synagogue in the entire country. Opposite the synagogue stands a nineteenth-century mansion made famous in *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* for a homosexual lovers' quarrel that culminated in murder. But as I sat there that morning, I thought not of Washington or of murderous love affairs, but of why the carved wooden *bimah* and the

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pillars vaulting into the neo-Gothic emptiness were painted to look like stone.

I felt distant from the thirty or forty southern Jews among whom I sat. For some reason, memory latched onto a midnight mass Harriet and I had attended as tourists three and a half months after we stood beneath the *chuppah,* two among hundreds of visitors, most of whom entered Saint John the Divine as they might have walked into the Louvre or the Metropolitan Museum of Art. More tourists than worshipers packed the cathedral that Christmas Eve, and I soon came to feel ashamed of my presence there, as if I had been caught peeping through a keyhole, spying on the intimate acts of strangers. I felt similar shame, a feeling of not belonging, of being out of place, in Temple Mikve Israel. I felt unwanted, an intruder in the house of a God I could no longer acknowledge as my God but for whose presence I still yearned.

Then the rabbi asked the congregation to rise for the recitation of the *Sh'ma,* the acknowledgment of God's oneness that Jews have voiced, alone or in unison, since Moses brought the tablets of the law down from Sinai. Only then did I feel that I belonged in this synagogue that would have been as alien to my father as the *shtetl* he grew up in would have been alien to Scarlett O'Hara. And as my agnostic voice joined with the voices of Savannah Jews to proclaim God's singularity to the world, I suddenly felt not merely at home, but at peace, at peace with that one God I yearned for but could no longer believe in; at peace with that one people, some of whom no longer considered me part of "the tribe"; at peace with the memory-obsessed self that writers are condemned to live with; and at peace with this melting pot called America.

In a world in which religious civil war threatens to destroy a Jewish state where non-observant and ultra-Orthodox can no longer even agree on what a Jew is, that age-old declaration of God's oneness soared into the soft Southern air of a neo-Gothic synagogue in Savannah. *Am Yisroael chai!* Mr. Danzig used to cry, ruler punctuating the air as if it were God's sword. *Am Yisroael chai! The Jewish people live!* As we do, here in America, where the pot still simmers for all. And may that one God before whom the child I once was trembled, and in whom the adult I am now claims not to believe, add his "Amen!" to that.

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JOHN UPDIKE

Transparent Stratagems

(Based on an Article in *Scientific American*,
"Transparent Animals," by Sönke Johnsen)

To be unseen: a key to sea survival,
within that boundless and unsolid mass
where up is slightly brighter and down is cobalt
deepening to purple, death everywhere.

Here in still silence evolution has
the scope of volume and the breadth of slaughter
it needs to be inventive. Venus's
girdles, so-called, millimeters thick

but six feet long, pass jellyfish whose maws
are filmy, four-cornered food-traps betrayed
by eight red gonads. Even retinas,
retaining light, are not, therefore, see-through,

and so *Cystoma*, a kind of roach of glass,
back-stroking slyly by, has optic discs
both huge and thin, and a needle-slender gut,
since food digesting also is opaque.

Some pinlike guts are always vertical,
no matter how the creature's body tilts,
to cast the smallest shadow. Protocols
of great discretion mark the watery feast.

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Gelatinous means near-invisible,
but delicate and slow; a passing fin
can shred you in a blink, and scientists
destroy what they would study. Siphonophores

have stinging organs shaped like baby fish,
and when a predator approaches these,
it's ambushed by an unsuspected bulk!
Transparent snails! Transparent octopi!

Down here, the very skin can hide—refraction
indices douse reflectivity
with furtive microscopic surface bumps
more minuscule than half of light's wavelength,

while body cells secrete their fat in droplets
scaled to be overlooked. Still, you are seen
and eaten. Death knows who is here, though we
avoid display, stay home, and think clear thoughts.

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Boca Grande Sunset

Big Mouth, FL, where all the billionaires
are pushing out the millionaires—so goes
the local joke. Sand is a dollar a grain.
Still, the sunset comes free, and clutter-free,
done with a circle and straight line. The Gulf
has given up its Caribbean tint
already and unrolls metallic breakers
in gilded flight from the sinking sore orb.

It, touching the horizon, changes form
like an invading molecule sucked oblong
at a membrane's verge. It turns barn-shape,
broad red; is half a disc, and then a tent
trembling; then less, and is doused. A gull flaps home
through bloodied skies. Event succeeds event.

John Updike's most recent volumes of verse are *Collected Poems 1953–1993* and *A Helpful Alphabet of Friendly Objects*. He contributed "To a Skylark" and "Marine Hotel, North Berwick, Scotland, May 1998" to the Spring 1999 issue of the SCHOLAR.

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Life in Motion

NICOLE LAMY

1

Three years ago I took pictures of all the houses I've lived in. The houses impress not in beauty but in number—twelve houses before I turned thirteen. For me the moves had always resisted coherent explanation—no military reassignments or evasion of the law. I wanted to gather the photos as charms against fallible memory, like the list of lost things I used to keep: a plastic purse filled with silver dollars, a mole-colored beret, a strip of negatives from my brother's first day of kindergarten. I planned to bind the photos in an album and give them to my mother. Maybe then, I thought, we could read our lives like straightforward narratives. Wise readers know that all stories follow one of two paths: The Stranger Comes to Town or The Journey. My life in motion suggested both.

2

When idea turned to plan, I asked my father for a list of the addresses I couldn't remember. Instead, as I had hoped, he offered to drive me through Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts himself. My father, too, took photographs, and I wanted to draw him into my life a little, remind him of the times during car trips when, as dusk deepened, he would switch on the light inside the car, without prompting, so that I could continue to read.

3

I photographed the houses and the apartments and the surprising number of duplexes (so often did we live in the left half of a house that I wonder if I've developed a right-hemisphere problem—I imagine the right side of my brain paler and more shriveled than its better

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half, as atrophied and bleached as an arm that has been in a cast all summer), though I never asked to be let inside. I remembered the flow of rooms in most houses and I could imagine walking through them in a sort of Ciceronian memory system for childhood.

4

The photographs pretend no artistic merit. I centered most of the houses in my viewfinder as I stood on opposite sidewalks. Occasionally a branch or a piece of the neighboring house appears at the edge of the frame. Otherwise the book is a collection of residential mug shots. I wasn't accustomed to snapping pictures of whole buildings without people cluttering the frames, and as I focused before each shot I thought of the pictures my father had taken during his early twenties: ducks and snowdrifts and weathered cottages. Looking through my father's pictures, my mother would squint with mock earnestness at yet another image of a dilapidated barn and ask, "Where were we, behind the barn?"

5

At the first house—125 Wood Street, a gray three-family at the edge of the campus where my father had been a sophomore—I toyed with perspective. I held my camera at my hip; I crouched by the mailboxes, trying to imagine a toddler's vantage point. No pre-school impressions came flooding back; I gained nothing but stares from the neighbors. I thought of the family lore about the short time we lived on Wood Street. By 1972, the sixties still hadn't retreated from Lewiston, Maine. The perennial students who shared our building kept the house reeking pleasantly of weed, and our downstairs neighbor wandered up to our apartment now and again to shower, since her bathtub was occupied by her pet duck. Her thesis, my mother insisted, had something to do with roller skates, and she decorated her apartment with black lights and mini-marshmallows, dipped in fluorescent paint, which she stuck to branches that hung from her ceiling. At night, when the lights came on, visitors were treated to an electrifying set of unlikely constellations.

6

From Maine we moved south to New Hampshire. Rooting out the apartments in the freshly overdeveloped landscape of New Hampshire was a trickier prospect; some of the photos of these houses show unfamiliar additions, self-installed skylights. Some had new, paved-over driveways, others aluminum siding. One apartment complex in southern New Hampshire remained intact, though the surrounding woods had been leveled to receive three new strip malls. When we wandered

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closer to the Massachusetts border, images reversed themselves and I found myself remembering the houses' odd absences: an oval of yellowed grass showed where an above-ground pool had sat; a chimney stopped abruptly with no fireplace attached.

During each move, after the boxes had been unpacked, my father would turn their openings to the ground and use a pocketknife to cut windows and doors. The refrigerator boxes were best, skyscrapers with grass floors. In my cardboard house I would read cross-legged into the evening, ignoring my parents' invitations to take-out dinners in our new yard until my father lifted the box off me and walked away, bearing my cardboard home, leaving me blinking in the dusk.

7

Now when I leave my apartment for vacation, no matter how anticipated the trip, I experience numbing panic—will I ever see home again? I'm sympathetic to Rilke's Eurydice: What did she care about Orpheus and his willpower? Sure, she had her reasons: hell living had filled her with death and isolated her from human touch. No doubt she could have grown accustomed to the rocks and rivers of Hades. Who among us can get our mind around a move that drastic? From one side of the eternal duplex to the other. Each time I return home from vacation, rooms don't appear the same as I left them. Walls seem to meet floors at subtly altered angles. Careful inspections—heel-toe, heel-toe around each of the rooms—reveal no evidence of the perceived.

8

After my parents split, I kept most of my assorted five-year-old's treasures at the white three-family where I lived with my mother, watched over by a grim, disapproving landlady. My father's wall-to-wall-carpeted bachelor apartment always smelled faintly of hops; he and his two roommates all owned water beds and motorcycles. My personal inventory at my father's new home was limited to a Holly Hobbie nightgown, *The Little Princess*, and Milton Bradley's Sorry!, a game that requires players to apologize without sincerity after forcing their competitors to start again.

9

I found the post-divorce houses on my own. At one address, the brown-stained house I had known in early grade school wasn't there at all. Developers had knocked it down, then paved over the spot to provide parking for the neighboring convenience store and candy shop. On the winter afternoon when I visited, I snapped a photo of a

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stray shopping cart that had rolled away from the convenience store to the spot where the kitchen had been. The shot, of the lonely shopping cart illuminated by a hazy beam of light, has a Hallmark devotional-card quality. I have no sentimental feelings about the house, though. I even felt satisfaction when I saw the smoothly paved parking lot; it was as though I had willed the destruction of the site of many childhood disappointments (new stepfather! mid-first-grade school switch! dog runs away from home!).

The edges of the photograph give more away. At the top of the frame I can spot a sliver of the foundation of the house that backed up to ours. My friend Annette lived there, an only child whose mother cut women's hair in the pink room adjacent to their dining room and whose father cured meat, hung in strips—dark and pale, meat and fat—in their cellar.

At the left edge of the frame, the tail of an *a* is visible, part of a glowing sign advertising "Gina—Psychic," the fortune-teller who set up shop next door.

10

In a decorative gesture, I planned to hand-color the photographs as if they were pre-Kodachrome portraits of children with blossom-pink cheeks and lips. Armed with the oils and pencils, however, I only touched up a piece of every home—a chimney, a storm door, a front gate. If stacked, they'd make a flip-book composite of a home.

Red shutters and verdant bushes decorate the house after the last fold in the book. There, the three of us—mother, sister, and new brother, aged three—began living alone together for the first time. The stepfather had come and gone, leaving the three of us to find balance in our uneasy triumvirate. Neighbors and shopkeepers looked at us, curious. I could tell that the age gaps perplexed them—too few years between a mother and daughter who chatted like girlfriends and too many between a sister and brother who looked almost like mother and son. Their confusion was compounded by my mother's youth and beauty and by the way at age thirteen I seemed to have passed directly to thirty-five.

The red-shuttered house was home the longest, and it is the only house my brother remembers. When I handed the coloring pencils over to him to spruce up the image of the old house, he colored the whole thing. He and my mother still live in that duplex, formerly the parish house for the Congregational church across the street. We haven't been the only ones comfortable there. Pets and pests flourish: a dog, rabbits, guinea pigs, escaped reptiles, moths and silverfish, hollow shells of worms in macaroni boxes, squirrels in the attic.

The parish house has walls that slant toward the middle and floor-

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boards that creak too frequently and too loudly to be creepy. During the first year, while discovering the rules and limits of our new family, we cleared the dining room table each night after dinner and began to play.

The three of us played games from my mother's childhood—tiddledywinks, pick-up-sticks, PIT. And after my brother fell asleep, my mother and I drank tea and played Password, Boggle, and Scrabble, stopping only when the board was almost filled and our wooden racks held two or three impossible consonants. A few years ago, chasing a marble that had slipped through a wrought iron heating grate, my brother lifted the panel by one of its iron curls and found, caught in the black cloth, game pieces of all kinds: dice, tiddledywinks, cribbage pegs, smooth wooden squares with black letters—pieces we had barely missed from games we had continued to play.

11

When the photo project was complete, I felt a historian's satisfaction. I had gathered the proof of my life and given it a shape. To create the album I cut a long strip of black paper and folded and flipped it as if to cut paper dolls. I printed the images small and pasted them in the accordion book. Held from the top, the book tumbles open to reveal twelve homes logically connected.

My mother saw the book as evidence of a life hastily lived. When she unknotted the ribbon around the tidy package and allowed it to unfold, I watched her face seize up.

"Ha, ha," she pushed the sounds out with effort. "All my failures," she said as she held the book away from her in an exaggerated gesture. I had tried to piece a story out of a life that I saw as largely unplanned. For my mother, this life led by reaction had eventually settled into a kind of choice. I was ashamed I thought it was mine to figure out.

12

One night, a few weeks before I moved out of the parish house duplex into my own apartment, I returned home and wheeled my bike around to the back of the house. Glancing up at the brightly lit windows, I was afforded an unusual glimpse of the daily theater of my family. From my spot in the yard I saw a woman in the kitchen chopping vegetables and talking on the phone, while a couple of rooms over, a gangly teenage boy sat in a chair by the television. Startled to be given a chance to see the house as a stranger might, I watched for a few moments and tried to imagine the lives of those inside.

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Bittersweet

SUSAN DONNELLY

When you reach for a branch
it ropes forward, drags other branches with it.
You've heard it's a nuisance vine,
bittersweet, despite its old-gold berries,
the deep coral red when the gold cracks open.

You have this life, and sore heart,
and a weather caught around you
even gold can't penetrate,
but hear your mother's voice saying:
Sue, if you want bittersweet,
I know just where to find it

and follow her path to the brambles
beyond the chain-link fence by the T stop.
Today you could see your mother's whole life
as a quest for bittersweet. So beautiful,
with its tangles, it brings tears to your eyes.

But lately your eyes tear easily,
don't they, trying hard
to see colors again. You stand here
with a long curved whip of bittersweet in your hands,
jewels at either end. And a need to decide
which end to cut, which to let spill over.

Susan Donnelly, the author of *Eve Names the Animals* and a recent chapbook, *The Ether Dome*, has new poems in the *Atlantic Monthly* and forthcoming in *Poetry*.

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Fish, Flesh, and Foul

The Anti-Vegetarian Animus

STEVEN G. KELLMAN

Giving up flesh is not nearly as traumatic as giving up the ghost. Although thousands have been martyred for their refusal to eat meat, vegetarians today suffer merely a species of social death. Stop eating what George Bernard Shaw, a recovered carnivore, called "scorched corpses of animals" and you become either the pariah or the cynosure of the dinner party, either barred or badgered over culinary preferences. "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are," declared the French gourmet Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, not the first or last to demand a full accounting of a stranger's diet. Determined to minimize suffering, I ate my last hamburger almost thirty years ago, but I still am often grilled about who I think I am.

What about the pain you cause to carrots? Do you get enough protein and vitamin B_{12}? Are you willing to provide sanctuary to endangered cockroaches? In a dog-eat-dog world, why deny yourself the savor of a wiener? Would you be so self-righteous if you were stranded in the Sierras with the Donners?

Sometimes a questioner sincerely seeks to understand, but often the interrogation is flippant or even hostile. "Oh, come!" said Shaw, when asked to explain his abstinence from flesh. "Why should you call me to account for eating decently?" But unless they lead cloistered lives or live off cacti in the desert, vegetarians grow accustomed to the curiosity and animosity of others. In 1791, John Oswald began a pioneering book on

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animal rights by complaining that he was "fatigued with answering the enquiries, and replying to the objections of his friends, with respect to the singularity of his mode of life." Oswald called his book *The Cry of Nature; or, an Appeal to Mercy and to Justice on Behalf of the Persecuted Animals,* and one cannot help assigning its kindly author to the category of persecuted animals. Look there, too, for gentle Joseph Ritson, the Englishman whose 1802 work *An Essay on Abstinence from Animal Food as a Moral Duty* is characterized by the venerable *Dictionary of National Biography* as bearing "marks of incipient insanity."

But diners who, for reasons of ethics, environment, or health, choose not to partake of fish, flesh, or fowl do not solicit pity, and it is odd to speak of them as a class of victims. When the Canadian singer k. d. lang declared on TV that "meat stinks," cattlemen led a campaign to ban and burn her records at more than three dozen radio stations across North America. Telephone threats harassed her mother out of Consort, Alberta, where a sign proclaiming "Home of k. d. lang" was vandalized with the scrawl "Eat beef, dyke." In this instance, at least, some rednecks probably found it harder to swallow dissenting culinary practices than dissenting sexual ones. Yet, instructive as it is about dominant social attitudes, the hassle lang has suffered for her views on food is of a different order from the butchery suffered by gays, blacks, Jews, Indians, Gypsies, Tutsis, and other scapegoats. (Livestock goats, too, are not raised to die of old age.) Middle-class families squabble as much over menus as TV selections, but to find wholesale slaughter over dietary choices, you have to go back to the Inquisition, which originated as a crusade against heretical vegetarians.

Vegetarianism has a history, stretching into the Paleolithic mists when, hunting and gathering, *Homo sapiens* distinguished himself from most other hominids by feeding on flesh. Opportunistic organisms, humans eat everything, though the invention of Alka-Seltzer is a caveat that maybe we should not. Yet, according to the Book of Genesis, Adam and Eve never needed flesh and blood to sustain themselves in the Garden of Eden; and Ovid—like Raphael in Milton's *Paradise Lost*—imagined a Golden Age in which butchery would not be a precondition for nutrition. Ambrosia and nectar were sustenance enough for the Greek gods, and in the Homeric "Hymn to Hermes," the messenger of Mount Olympus resisted the temptation to feast on meat, lest it make him mortal. Though it is moot whether Socrates and Plato themselves partook of meat at the banquets they attended, the ideal state imagined in *The Republic* is a vegetopia. Many other ancient writers, including Empedocles, Plotinus, Plutarch, Porphyry, Seneca, and Theophrastus, fixed their canons and appetites against slaughter, and the original Epicurean, Epicurus himself, found pleasure in forgoing

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flesh. Pythagoras's regimen, which, for obscure reasons, banned beans as well as meat, was so exemplary that for more than two thousand years those who abstained at least from flesh were called Pythagoreans. The word *vegetarian*—from *vegetus,* Latin for sound, whole, vital—was not coined until 1847, at the founding of the Vegetarian Society of the UK in Ramsgate, England. But shadowing this history, like a fungus on a cantaloupe, is a chronicle of animosity—a persistent record of misunderstanding, mistrust, and misbehavior toward those who refuse to consume fish, flesh, or fowl. Vegephobia blights Greek comedies of the third and fourth centuries that satirize Pythagoras, and it persists in belligerent banter by the dinner-party smart-ass intent on discrediting guests who prefer aubergine in tomato to *vitello tonnato.* If every creophagist was obliged to kill the calf that ends up veal, the population of Pythagoreans would multiply by pi. On the other hand, "If every person went and killed a chicken each year, the world would be a lot more peaceful place," sneered Ted Nugent, a hard rocker who extols the excellence of bow-and-arrow hunting. But in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night,* Sir Andrew Aguecheek's assessment of his own dullness skewers Nugent: "I am a great eater of beef and I believe that does harm to my wit."

"Vegetables are interesting," quipped the humorist Fran Lebowitz, "but lack a sense of purpose when unaccompanied by a good cut of meat." Such cracks are merely obnoxious; ridicule is the tribute that carnivores pay Pythagoreans. More genuinely noxious was the mob of butchers and bakers who rioted in Boston in 1837 when Sylvester Graham, Presbyterian minister and the inventor of an eponymous cracker, preached against the evils of abattoirs and white flour. It is one thing to declare—as the senior George Bush (who advertised his populist tastes by munching publicly on fried pork rinds) did in 1986—one's abhorrence of broccoli. (Code for vegephobia, the announcement was greeted with sympathetic mirth by commentators who might have recoiled in horror at the implicit racism had the future president dared, instead, to dis jazz.) But it is quite another matter to crucify those who feed on crucifers.

In 276 A.D., Mani, founder of the religious movement that bore his name, was tortured and executed by the Sasanian rulers of Persia for trying to convert them to his unorthodox ways, which were meatless. A century later, Timothy, the Patriarch of Alexandria, was so fearful that Manichaeanism might infiltrate Christendom that he exacted taste tests of his clergy; those who refused to eat meat were presumed Manichaean and punished severely. The dualism of the Manichaeans disturbed the early fathers more than their asceticism, but both challenged church dogma and authority, and it was easy to seize on vegetarianism as both a symptom and an assertion of heresy. Despite the best efforts of Augustine, himself a lapsed Manichaean, the doctrine was not entirely eradicated,

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and when it resurfaced in the eleventh century with the steak-spurning Bogomils, many were in fact burned at the stake. When Manichaeanism spread to Asia, so did persecution, as evidenced by an edict promulgated in China in 1141: "All meat-eschewing demon worshippers and those who meet together at night and disperse at dawn to practice and propagate evil teachings shall be strangulated." In medieval Provence, the Cathars, heirs of Mani whose meatless diet also excluded milk and cheese, were condemned for doctrinal errancy. Preaching against Catharist deviancy in 1163, Eckbert of Schonau enumerated ten heresies of which they were guilty, including: "The second heresy: avoiding meat. Those who have become full members of their sect avoid all meat. This is not for the same reason as monks and other followers of the spiritual life abstain from it: they say that meat must be avoided because all flesh is born of coition, and therefore they think it unclean." In 1208, Pope Innocent III declared war, in the form of the Albigensian Crusade, against the vegetarian infidels, and tens of thousands were slaughtered in defense of carnivorous Christianity. The Inquisition was established in 1231, when Pope Gregory IX established courts in southern France to conduct inquests into the piety of suspected meat-eschewing infidels.

Despite centuries of persecution, vegetarianism has survived. Vegetarians, less vulnerable to heart disease, stroke, cancer, and other ills that flesh eaters are heir to, have thrived. According to the adage, one man's meat is another man's poison, and according to much current research, meat can be toxic to a man or woman. Though a Jewish proverb insists that "meat, not hay, makes the lion roar," many humans whom we lionize have disagreed. Vegetarianism has not impeded the athletic achievements of Hank Aaron, Billie Jean King, Martina Navratilova, Paavo Nurmi, Dave Scott, or Bill Walton. Though Victor Frankenstein's gentle creature ate no flesh, it is also true that Adolf Hitler gave up meat shortly after the suspicious death of his niece Geli Raubal in 1931. Yet so have many finer ethical minds, including Gautama Buddha, Leonardo da Vinci, John Wesley, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Susan B. Anthony, Leo Tolstoy, Mohandas Gandhi, Franz Kafka, S. Y. Agnon, Albert Schweitzer, and Cesar Chavez. "For the animals, it is an eternal Treblinka," observed Isaac Bashevis Singer, who refused to be complicit in the culinary holocaust. Vincent van Gogh became a vegetarian after visiting a slaughterhouse, and so would many others if meat were less convenient—or were not packaged in savory patties and cutlets that obscure their bloody origins.

"Animals are my friends," explained Shaw, "and I don't eat my friends." Animals are not necessarily my friends, but I do not feast on sentient strangers either. Nor do I exploit them. As a vegan (a word coined in 1944, for a practice that goes back to ancient times), I avoid all

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animal products, including dairy, eggs, and leather. I chewed my last chop almost thirty years ago, my last omelette about nine. Though the Book of Matthew proclaims that "man shall not live by bread alone," this man lives by broccoli, tempeh, carrots, spinach, honeydew, cashews, and tofu, too. If veganism has not made me a better man, one who refuses to feed off the misery of others, it has made me a healthier one.

"All flesh is grass," declared Isaiah, but surely an envoy of the Deity can distinguish between ribs and rice. Trimming elephant grass is gardening, but harvesting an elephant is butchery. In fact, Isaiah himself equated meat with murder: "He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man," quoth the prophet in chapter 66, verse 3. The vegetarian movement in nineteenth-century America began with the Bible, in a group that called itself the Bible Christian Church and established itself in Philadelphia in 1817. Abstention from flesh was further spread by the Seventh-Day Adventists. But John Harvey Kellogg, the dynamic evangelist of whole-grain hygiene, embraced vegetarianism for secular salvation, to invigorate the fragile flesh. He made his fortune out of cornflakes, peanut butter, shredded wheat, and other victuals invented to prolong and fortify the lives of mortal bodies. Like his rival C. W. Post, who found riches in Grape Nuts and Postum, Kellogg based his work in Battle Creek, Michigan, a town that attracted nudists, homeopaths, mesmerists, phrenologists, pacifists, abolitionists, prohibitionists, and feminists, as well as the derision of those who dismissed them all as fakes and crazies.

In *The Road to Wellville,* a 1994 novel by T. Coraghessan Boyle set in Battle Creek in 1907, Will Lightbody, a reluctant patient at the Kellogg sanitarium, resents his wife Eleanor's descent into "the morass of vegetarianism, neurasthenia, frigidity, and quackery." Listing vegetarianism in an inventory of unpopular practices is a standard strategy of scoffers. When, for example, in a 1994 car review, P. J. O'Rourke attacked critics of the internal combustion engine, he indulged in derision by association and alliteration: "They're losers, the three-bong-hit saviors of the earth, lava lamp luddites, global warming dolts, ozone boneheads, peace creeps, tofu twinks, Birkenstock buttinskis, and bed-wetting vegetarian bicyclists who bother whales on weekends." When, incensed at fans of the rival New York Mets, Atlanta Braves pitcher John Rocker maligned immigrants, gays, and ethnic minorities, he was fined and suspended. If he had castigated Mets fans as sproutheads and complained that you cannot find a decent hot dog at Shea Stadium, he would have been adored.

"I want there to be no peasant in my realm so poor that he will not have a chicken in his pot every Sunday," proclaimed Henri IV. If the Bourbon monarch's wish had been their command, every subject would have been conscripted as a carnivore. Echoing Henri IV, Herbert Hoover

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was elected president of the United States in 1928 with the slogan "A chicken in every pot, a car in every garage." Economic conditions prevented Hoover from keeping that promise, but ethical considerations should have produced the same effect. Turkeys often run for office, but poultry does not vote, and most of those who do go to the polls support the hegemony of the meat culture. Politicians have little to gain and, owing to the corporate clout of those who process and market animal carcasses, much to lose by publicly embracing vegetarianism. Even heavyweight Mike Tyson cannot match the clout of a lobbyist for the Tyson poultry empire. The ritual demand of any national election is that candidates sample the cuisines of the regions and ethnic groups whose support they are seeking, and they score best by sharing meat: fajitas, kielbasa, gumbo, pastrami, ribs, fried chicken, prosciutto. The road to the White House is paved with the bones of slaughtered beasts. On the quintessential American holiday, Thanksgiving, any national leader who does not devour a turkey may be thought seditious.

In another obligatory ritual, the highest officials from the city or state in which two championship teams compete customarily place wagers with each other in the form of a hamper of local edibles. The offering is almost always meat. After the St. Louis Rams beat the Tennessee Titans in Super Bowl XXXIV, for example, Tennessee Governor Don Sundquist sent Missouri Governor Mel Carnahan a supply of Tennessee country ham. In 1999, when the Super Bowl pitted the Atlanta Falcons against the Denver Broncos, Mayor Willington Webb put his Colorado buffalo steaks up against Mayor Bill Campbell's Georgia spare ribs. After the New York Knicks lost the 1999 NBA finals to the San Antonio Spurs, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani lost his bet with Howard Peak and sent the San Antonio mayor a generous supply of Nathan's franks. For millions of ravenous fans, hot dogs, not tofu, are the sacramental substance of sporting rites.

During fifteen terms in the House of Representatives, until 1996, Congressman Andrew Jacobs of Indiana, who sponsored legislation to ease the plight of farm animals, made no secret of his dietary preferences. But even the *Congressional Directory* refers to Jacobs as "an eccentric Democrat," and ordinary elected officials are more likely to admit that they are gay than vegetarian. Coming out of the produce locker means facing the fire of creophagist constituents. Bill Clinton is famously, avidly omnivorous, and when his daughter, Chelsea, disclosed that she is a vegetarian, she did it during her father's second term, when her culinary deviancy could no longer affect his electoral prospects. Vegetarian Patti Reagan Davis was estranged from her father during the years he presided over sanguinary state banquets. Francisco Madero, the president of Mexico from 1911 to 1913, after leading the revolution that overthrew dictator Porfirio Díaz, was assassinated twice—once by his own security forces and

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once by the *Encyclopædia Britannica,* whose entry on Madero suggests that his vegetarianism was a defect: "He was an unimpressive man—short, slender, and pale—and a vegetarian, teetotaler, and spiritualist."

There once was an American Vegetarian Party, and it ran candidates for president and vice president four times, in 1948, 1952, 1956, and 1960. Its meager results are usually lumped under "Other," together with the scattered votes received by other token contenders. In politics—where Walter Mondale attacked the shallowness of his opponents' qualifications for the Democratic presidential nomination by asking "Where's the beef?"—*vegetarian* is almost synonymous with lunatic fringe. At a rally in South Carolina during his insurgent run for the Republican presidential nomination, Senator John McCain invoked vegetarianism to emphasize how widely he was reaching out to scattered, tiny, and unlikely constituencies. "I say to independents, Democrats, Libertarians, vegetarians," he said in February, "come on over and vote for me tomorrow." Three days later, McCain repeated the jest in Michigan: "I don't care if you're Republican or Democrat or Libertarian or vegetarian."

Yet vegetarians are not such rare birds. The *Vegetarian Times* estimates that 12.5 million Americans are vegetarians, which means that they outnumber Pennsylvanians. But who gets more respect? According to a proverb of the Pennsylvania Dutch, "A louse in the cabbage is better than no meat at all." That is a lousy, tasteless claim, refuted by the Odessa mutiny, which began, in 1905, when sailors in the Russian navy refused to eat meat infested with maggots. Actually, ascertaining the number of vegetarians is an imprecise science, since follow-up questions reveal that some who identify themselves as "vegetarian" eat fish or chicken or occasionally even consume red meat. A 1999 poll conducted by the Vegetarian Resource Group asked a random sample of Americans whether, when dining out, they always order a dish without meat, fish, or fowl. Of the total, 5.5 percent said yes—5 percent of the men and 6 percent of the women. But is it possible that Americans are more particular when choosing from a restaurant menu than when reaching into the refrigerator?

In Britain, where the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, a model for humane organizations in other countries, was founded in 1824 and where animal rights agitation has a longer and more strident history than anywhere else in the West, vegetarianism is more commonplace. Even in provincial English village pubs, I have encountered menus that explicitly offer vegan entrees. In Cape Town, by contrast, a restaurant I happened on near the South African Parliament offered nothing for even a lacto-ovo vegetarian. When I explained my dietary requirements to the waitress, she assured me that the soup was vegetarian. But floating in the bowl she brought was some suspicious

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matter. "Well, it has only a few pieces of chicken," explained the waitress. Traveling in Eastern Europe poses no problem for vegans, as long as they are willing to fast.

A 1998 poll found that 7 percent of Britons agreed with the statement: "I am a vegetarian and eat no meat at all." And since the prospect of pestilence tends to concentrate the mind, incidents of mad cow disease, *E. coli,* and salmonella have provided additional incentives to avoid red meat and poultry. The founding of the Carnivores Club in London in 1996, in the midst of the European crisis over British beef, was an act of bravado that defied the patent logic of vegetarianism. So, too, did Auberon Waugh, when, in a 1999 article in the *Daily Telegraph,* he railed against "the vegetarian underground, a worldwide conspiracy of animal sentimentalists working in secret, or under deep cover, using our traditional class and regional animosities to promote its repulsive cause."

"Vegetarian underground" sounds like a mushroom factory, and whatever movement there is to encourage abstention from meat is not nearly as organized or as potent as the culture of carnivorism. Dining on chops is firmly rooted in the patriarchy. "Beefeater" is the name the English apply to the hardy, valiant yeomen of the guard, as if meat were implicit in masculinity. William Cody acquired his manly reputation and his nickname—Buffalo Bill—by slaying thousands of burly beasts. In the sexual ecology of the dinner table, salads are "lady food," unlike steaks and roasts. According to the historian Todd L. Savitt, male slaves in antebellum Virginia were fed twice as much meat as their female counterparts. During World War I, meat was withheld from civilian women in order to provide a steady supply for fighting men. A meat-and-potatoes man is a redundancy, since, echoing cannibalistic cultures in which warriors acquire strength by devouring their foes, males nourish and affirm their virility by consuming flesh. If, like butcher shops, taverns are a man's domain, salad bar is an oxymoron.

Real Men Don't Eat Quiche, announced Bruce Feirstein in a 1982 bestseller that spoofed the culture's paradigm of yahoo machismo. "Real Men," wrote Feirstein, "avoid all members of the wimp food group, including crudités, lemon mousse, crêpes, avocado, capons, chives, shrimp dip, and fruit compote." Instead, he claimed, they wolf down steaks, hamburgers, cheeseburgers, bacon cheeseburgers, California burgers, pizza burgers, chili burgers, Big Macs, Whoppers, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and ham and Swiss on rye. In the demographics of vegetarianism there is a notable gender gap. Women constitute a disproportionate share of the population of Pythagoreans. In the survey that found Britain 7 percent vegetarian, the figure was 10 percent for women but only 4 percent for men. In a 1997 Roper Poll in which 5 percent of Americans claimed never to eat red meat, the figure was 6

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percent for women and only 4 percent for men. A man who chooses ratatouille over ribs risks aspersions over his sexual identity, as though swallowing compote earned one the derogatory epithet "fruit."

Just as not all vegetarians are saints, not all vegephobes are psychopathic muttonheads who believe that Whoppers grow in burger patches. Even Mark Twain was not above taking cheap shots at Pythagoreans. "First God created fools, that was for practice," quipped Twain. "Then he created vegetarians." When he created Charles Kinbote, the deranged, homicidal protagonist of *Pale Fire,* Vladimir Nabokov included vegetarianism as one of his aberrations. And though you would expect the author of *Animal Farm* to respect the right to life of barnyard creatures, George Orwell was a persistent scourge of vegetarians. A champion of common sense and the common people, Orwell identified with the working class, believing with Winston Smith in *1984* that "the future belonged to the proles." To Orwell's usually lucid mind, avoiding meat was the jejune indulgence of aristocrats and intellectuals.

For most of European history, meat has been a mark of power and privilege and a rare delicacy for the peasantry. The origins of "pecuniary" in *pecus,* the Latin word for herd, and of "capital" in *capita,* Latin for head (of cattle), are a reminder that meat was long a measure of wealth. Monks renounced flesh, to demonstrate their indifference to worldly advantage, and it was not until the twentieth century, when Colonel Sanders catered to the civilian infantry and even soup kitchens put a chicken in the pot, that the implications of flesh for class were reversed. Now the gentry sups on arugula, while plebeians munch meat loaf. "The ordinary human being," proclaimed Orwell, speaking for the working bloke (and for himself), "would sooner starve than live on brown bread and carrots." In *The Road to Wigan Pier,* an account of indigence in the Midlands that was published in 1937, Orwell—who called himself a socialist—takes offense at an application for a socialist summer school that asks candidates whether they prefer vegetarian meals. "This kind of thing is by itself sufficient to alienate plenty of decent people," complains Orwell. "And their instinct is perfectly sound, for the food-crank is by definition a person willing to cut himself off from human society in hopes of adding five years on to the life of his carcase; that is, a person out of touch with common humanity." For Orwell, who sentimentalized the English working class as the salt of the earth, an aversion to salt pork would by definition make someone a "food-crank" and a misanthrope. By a curious act of moral calisthenics, "decent people" are recognized by their willingness to participate in mass slaughter.

Standards of decency change, and arbiters of etiquette have since adopted a more decent respect for the opinions of noncarnivorous man-

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kind. "Dieters and teetotalers should never feel it necessary to eat anything that is injurious to their health or contrary to their moral standards," insists Emily Post. "If you are, for example, a vegetarian, you need not feel obliged to taste the roast." And Peggy Post, advising hosts, also counsels toleration: "When you're planning a larger party, you needn't ask each guest about food restrictions, but to be on the safe side, make sure you include some 'neutral' dishes such as a vegetable platter, pasta with meatless sauce, and fresh fruit for dessert. That way, everybody will find something he or she enjoys." If every host was required to read the Posts, vegetarianism would be less a matter of social martyrdom.

Manners were not minded in January 1998, when vegetarianism was put on trial in Amarillo, Texas. Oprah Winfrey was charged with violating the state's food defamation law. During one of her TV shows in April 1996, vegetarian activist Howard Lyman had warned about the spread of mad cow disease into American herds. Oprah replied: "It has just stopped me cold from eating another burger." After her statement was aired, the market for cattle dropped by about $36 million. Instead of a posse, angry ranchers organized a lawsuit. But the not-guilty verdict affirmed the rights of Americans, even in Texas, to avow in public their aversion to beef.

In June 1997, two and a half years after it had begun, the longest trial in English legal history concluded with a judgment against David Morris, a former letter carrier, and Helen Steel, a former gardener. They were acquitted on most of the libel charges brought against them for distributing pamphlets proclaiming that, by mass-marketing hamburgers, McDonald's endangers human health, exploits labor, and devastates the environment. The corporation reportedly spent about ten million pounds to prosecute the two anti-meat crusaders, and though it ultimately succeeded in obtaining a token judgment of forty thousand pounds against them, it will probably never try to collect because the defendants are indigent and McDonald's would have to pay too high a price in public relations. Though the British courts found that Morris and Steel had indeed defamed the burger empire when they claimed its products are poisonous and contribute to starvation and deforestation in developing countries, their charges that McDonald's abuses children in its advertising, is cruel to animals, provides low wages and inadequate working conditions, and heightens the risk of heart disease were all affirmed by the verdicts.

It has long been easy to dismiss vegetarians as tender, feckless folk—like those who with Bronson Alcott created Fruitlands, the meat-free commune in nineteenth-century Massachusetts that lasted only seven months. They seem as quixotic as Esperantists, who plot world peace by evangelizing for a single artificial language. In fact, some Esperantists

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and vegetarians have been making gentle common cause since 1906, when they formed Tutmonda Esperantista Vegetariana Asocio.

Yet vegetarians today are more assertive. Many are no longer willing to settle for celery or gruel in schools, prisons, and restaurants. Airlines report an increase in requests for special meals. Passengers who reserve vegetarian entrées for their trips often draw envious stares from those nearby, who are forced to sate their appetites with standard fare. Airline food has probably done more than Leo Tolstoy to persuade our neighbors to pass up meat. Is there sociological significance to the fact that the best-selling novel of the 1990s, *The Bridges of Madison County,* tells the story of a livestock farmer's wife who falls in love with a Pythagorean stranger?

But if vegetarianism has become more prominent and popular, it has also provoked a new backlash, one that differs from familiar strategies of ridicule and ostracism only in its defensiveness. Like determined smokers who continue to puff long after tobacco has been proved lethal, some meat-eaters protest too much. In *Eat Fat* (1996), for example, Richard Klein attacks what Orwell might call the food police, the voices heard throughout the land that inveigh against pandemic obesity. Faced with the unprecedented cornucopia available to consumers, Klein urges us to dig in: "Even if fat is unhealthy, which it is and it isn't, for the vast majority of people, it's probably healthier than the alternative. The alternative is dieting, compulsive exercise, hypervegetarianism, diet pills." It is not clear just what Klein means by "hypervegetarianism," except that, like right-wing zealots who denounce any liberal as "ultra-liberal," he favors gluttony over antimuttony. Jeffrey Steingarten, too, attempts to stigmatize vegetarianism as a derangement. In *The Man Who Ate Everything* (1997), he celebrates his own omnivorousness and declares: "The more I contemplated food phobias, the more I became convinced that people who habitually avoid certifiably delicious foods are at least as troubled as people who avoid sex, or take no pleasure from it, except that the latter will probably seek psychiatric help, while food phobics rationalize their problem in the name of genetic inheritance, allergy, vegetarianism, matters of taste, nutrition, food safety, obesity, or a sensitive nature." Lacking evidence of meat's benefits for physical health, Steingarten and Klein presume that vegetarianism is harmful to mental health. Ignoring the ethical claims of vegetarianism, they can more easily dismiss it as dementia.

Assigned by a muckraking weekly called *Appeal to Reason* to investigate working conditions in the Chicago stockyards, Upton Sinclair was converted to vegetarianism—for merely three years, admittedly—by observing the process by which living animals are transformed into food. "One could not stand and watch very long without becoming philo-

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sophical, without beginning to deal in symbols and similes, and to hear the hog squeal of the universe," he wrote in *The Jungle,* the novel that provoked passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. But Sinclair, who was more interested in the rights of workers than those of cattle, was disappointed at instigating food reform rather than industrial revolution. "I aimed at the public's heart and by accident I hit it in the stomach," he complained.

Yet the stomach is a more reliable organ. About as virtuous as the penis, the heart can lead us into bloody deeds, but the belly is a moral compass. Haunted by the hog squeal of the world, I will not stomach nourishment that requires processing pigs into pork, calves into veal, and turkeys into drumsticks. Foie gras might be deemed a delicacy, but my conscience is too delicate to countenance any sustenance that is obtained by thrusting a spike down the throat of a living goose. It is an ichthyophagist's self-serving fantasy that, as the Star Kist ad contends, Charlie the Tuna yearns to be hooked, canned, and chewed. Kraft Foods would have us believe that the noblest avatar of a cow is the hot dog: "Oh I wish I was an Oscar Mayer wiener, for that is what I'd really like to be," goes the genial jingle, but the reality is much crueler.

No one wants a kosher Jew at a lobster bake, least of all the kosher Jew. Vegetarians are spoilsports at the banquet, and it is no wonder that they are resented for observing Lent throughout the year. Many seem, and even are, self-righteous about their choices, but they are surely right in insisting that what we eat be a matter of choice, not of habit, and that the choice be based not just on taste. Those who act on their convictions often emit an odor of sanctimony, yet those who do not reek of hypocrisy. The world is a plain of woe, and there often seems little one can do to minimize the pain. But every day, each of us makes decisions that determine life or death for other creatures. Supermarkets and restaurants are arenas for urgent moral combat, and those who opt to abstain from fish, flesh, and fowl ought not to be reviled or ridiculed.

Once, in a remote foreign capital, a dinner was held in my honor. To salute my presence in their country, the hosts set out on my plate a whole roast suckling pig. I stared at the unfortunate creature, a victim of brutal culinary customs, and he stared back. Though the pig was the evening's pièce de résistance, I managed to resist. It was better to risk puzzling or antagonizing my benefactors than to bear forever the guilt of slaying a shoat. No human need eat meat, and we most honor our humanity when we do not.

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Nobel Tics

Sins of Commission, Sins of Omission

GRACE MARMOR SPRUCH

The Nobel Prize is usually meted out with deliberation and fairness—but not always. Consider its inception, a century ago this December. Alfred Nobel's will specified five prizes—in physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature, and peace—to be awarded to those who had contributed most materially to the benefit of mankind during the preceding year. (Economics is a nouveau prix, established in 1968 by the Central Bank of Sweden.) One can imagine the workings of Nobel's mind as he chose the categories. As the inventor of dynamite, he was rooted in the sciences, hence the science prizes. The Peace Prize would seem an effective guilt-assuager for a man who will forever be associated with explosives. Literature? Well, one doesn't want to be one-sided or uncultured. But why no prize in mathematics, which has been called the queen and servant of science?

Was it that mathematics doesn't contribute "materially," or was it some weighty consideration like that underlying the debate over whether mathematics is invented by mathematicians or is simply out there in the universe, waiting to be discovered? (The buzz in mathematical circles is that it is neither.) The real reason is far simpler: the mathematician who would likely have been the first prizewinner, Gösta Mittag-Leffler, had won what, to Nobel, was the most important prize of all—the woman Nobel wanted to marry.

A present-day morsel of scientific—or sociological—trivia is that Mittag-Leffler is listed in *Who Was Who,* while Nobel is not. It could be argued that Nobel's Prizes immortalize him; and that argument could be

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met by claiming he bought that immortality. But Nobel has the more lasting memorial. By scientific convention, the country in which a new chemical element is discovered is given the honor of naming it; when element 102 was isolated in Sweden in 1958, it was christened Nobelium.

Albert Einstein provides an inverted example of the role of romance in the awarding of Nobel Prizes. Michele Besso, a devoted friend, handled many of his mundane affairs, freeing him to think his lofty thoughts. Besso arranged Einstein's divorce from his first wife; the financial settlement was to include the Nobel Prize stipend. Very generous—but the arrangement was made three years before Einstein received the prize.

We should not leave Einstein before noting what earned him his Nobel Prize for physics. Most people assume it was for his Theory of Relativity. Not so. In 1905, his *annus mirabilis,* the twenty-six-year-old Einstein published three papers on three different subjects—relativity was one—each of which could have won him a Nobel. The one the judges singled out was not in the same intellectual league with relativity theory; it described the law of the photoelectric effect. The jury's choice could be attributed to the wording of Nobel's will, with its emphasis on material contributions to mankind (which many believe favors experimental over theoretical work). No one, at the time of Einstein's award in 1921, could have predicted that his $E=mc^2$, which spelled out the terms of the conversion of matter into energy, would lead to resourceless countries being fueled by nuclear energy or chastened by the threat of nuclear war. The photoelectric effect, however, could be seen to have practical applications.

The story is actually more complex. The photoelectric effect itself has a deeper significance as the base of one of two pillars in the edifice of modern science—that pillar being quantum theory, and the other being relativity. But for a number of years following its publication, even the explanation of the photoelectric effect was controversial. In fact, when Einstein applied for a university position at about that time, a letter of recommendation from Max Planck, a Nobel laureate himself, took note of Einstein's occasional lapses into wild speculation—such as his concept of the photon, the quantum of light.

Despite his immense stature in the world of letters, Leo Tolstoy never won a Nobel Prize for literature. He was seventy-three in 1901, when the first Nobels were awarded, and he would live for another nine years. Others more luminous? Unlikely. Others less luminous but more senior? Also unlikely. The fact is that one of the Nobel judges denounced Tolstoy for advocating anarchism, holding eccentric religious beliefs, and stating that prizes were harmful to artists. Most of the other judges apparently were anti-Russian. One hears rumblings today about the literature award—and certainly the peace award—being politicized. But Tolstoy? Literature's Einstein? It's like locking Moses out of the synagogue.

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Emile Zola, the first writer to be nominated for the prize, was also voted down. Too daring, and Alfred Nobel supposedly didn't like his novels. Scanning the list of early laureates in literature, you'll be more struck by who did *not* win the prize than by who did. Mark Twain, George Meredith, Henry James, Strindberg, Brecht, Gorky, Valéry, O'Casey, Hardy, Rilke, Joyce—all were passed over.

I realize that a great deal of subjectivity enters into the deliberations over the award for literature. *Chacun à son goût,* and all that. But literature's subjectivity seems especially striking when I turn to the awards in my own area, physics, and see how little subjectivity there appears to have been. Of course there are some names that are unknown today, but it is hard to think of any greats who were omitted. True, one could quibble with the order in which the prizes were awarded. And it is also true that Einstein's award was delayed for some years through the influence of the anti-Semitic 1905 laureate Philipp E. A. von Lenard. But it is fair to say that there is a consensus on who is "good" in physics; physicists can even be ranked. And electrons have no nationality. A Russian experiment cannot be distinguished from an American experiment. It was a sport, in our younger years, for me and my colleagues to try to predict the year's prizewinner. And if a prediction was not fulfilled, since we were from New York, it was just a matter of "wait till next year." Without language and cultural differences to contend with—apart from some early over-representation of Scandinavians, which is understandable—there were few surprises; and those were usually because the prize was awarded for work whose significance hadn't been appreciated at the time it was done.

Let's turn now to another case, like Einstein's, of right-man-wrong-work: that of Enrico Fermi. This time, what was wrong was actually the work itself (its interpretation, at least), not the judges' selection of which work to cite. But first we need a short course on atomic physics.

In roughly the first quarter of this century, our picture of the atom came into focus. An atom consisted of a tiny nucleus containing the two heavy constituents of matter, positively charged protons and uncharged neutrons, while outside the nucleus was a third constituent—the light, negatively charged electrons. This was the last picture of the atom we were to see, because, with the advent of quantum mechanics in the second quarter of the century, our conception of the atom became mathematical, with the electrons having not precise positions in the atom but rather probabilities of being here or there. Since we cannot readily visualize probabilities, but still require visualizations, the old picture of the atom was retained, not only for pedagogy.

The number of protons in the nucleus determines the element: hydrogen has one proton, two protons gives us helium, three protons lithium, and so on up the Periodic Table of the Elements to uranium, the

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most massive element found in nature, with ninety-two protons in its nucleus. In a neutral atom, the number of electrons outside the nucleus equals the number of protons in the nucleus; the electron's negative charge has the same magnitude as the proton's positive charge. Several who contributed to this picture of the atom won Nobel Prizes: J. J. Thomson, for the discovery of the electron (his initials are always used; the same for his son, G. P., who also won a Nobel); Ernest Rutherford, but not for his experiments measuring the size of the nucleus; Niels Bohr, for "touching up" that last picture of the atom; Erwin Schrödinger, Werner Heisenberg, and P. A. M. Dirac, for mathematizing it.

Earlier, in 1903, the third Nobel Prize for physics had gone to Marie and Pierre Curie and Antoine Henri Becquerel for the study of radioactivity. (We haven't forgotten Fermi. All of the above is relevant.) In the nuclear Curie family, by 1935 there would be, among four people, five Nobel Prizes. Marie and Pierre's daughter Irène and her husband Frédéric Joliot-Curie (who added his wife's surname to his own) shared a chemistry prize for work on artificially produced radioactivity. The fifth was Marie's second Nobel, in chemistry, for the isolation of radium and polonium. When chemist Linus Pauling got his second Nobel—for peace—I could still point to Marie as the only person with two Nobels in science. When, in 1972, John Bardeen shared his second physics prize, the female chauvinist in me was disappointed. Bardeen's first award was shared for the transistor. Anyone who remembers big old radios stuffed with vacuum tubes and compares them with today's miniature marvels will not require an explanation of the transistor to appreciate Bardeen's work. His second award was shared for the theory of superconductivity, which can't be described in a limited space. But superconductivity, the phenomenon, can.

We all know that copper is a good conductor of heat (think copper pots) and of electricity. Silver is better, but for obvious reasons we don't make lamp wires out of silver. We don't make lamp wires out of copper anymore either, for the same reasons. We use aluminum, which isn't as good a conductor, but its price increases its attractiveness. What, then, is a superconductor, if silver is best? It turns out that at very, very, very low temperatures, some materials go into a state that makes their conductivity orders of magnitude better than that of silver. A current once started—by a battery, for example—would not stop flowing after the battery was removed. The question was why, or how. Bardeen was one of three researchers who explained the why and how. I won't. But a great deal of research has gone into producing "high temperature" superconductors—high actually being low, but not very, very, very low: roughly one hundred degrees below zero degrees centigrade. The aim is to get room-temperature superconductors. Then the trains will really run on time!

We're still headed for Fermi. But one more necessary addition, regarding radioactivity, which won Mme. Curie her first Nobel. The heavy ele-

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ments, those at the end of the Periodic Table, are unstable. Uranium emits particles from its nucleus and, in this process called radioactivity, becomes another element, since its nucleus now holds fewer than the ninety-two protons it had as uranium. Mme. Curie's daughter and son-in-law continued in the footsteps of Curie *mère* and *père* by synthesizing radioactivity in elements that normally do not undergo the process. Before these second-generation laureates, Ernest Rutherford had essentially started the whole artificial radioactivity business, and there was a question of whether the great physicist should get the physics or the chemistry prize; at that time, 1908, the work seemed closer to chemistry. Rutherford was somewhat miffed when he was given the chemistry prize; in his acceptance speech he said that he had observed many transformations in his work with radioactivity but had never seen one as rapid as his own, from physicist to chemist. (Rutherford's miff gives us a glimpse into the sociology—or psychology—of science, and the hierarchies therein.)

The transmutation of one element to another through nuclear reactions was a hot subject up through the thirties. In effect, it was a perverse realization of the medieval alchemist's dream of turning lead into gold: uranium and other heavy elements, after undergoing radioactivity, end up as lead. Fermi and his group in Rome, in the mid-thirties, wanted to produce elements heavier than those found in nature—"transuranic" elements, beyond uranium in the Periodic Table. They aimed for element 93. By bombarding uranium 238 with a neutron, they expected to get uranium 239. (Two numbers are associated with each element. For uranium, 92 identifies it by its number of protons; 235 or 238 is the number of heavy particles, protons plus neutrons, in its nucleus. Uranium 235 and uranium 238 are "isotopes," from the Greek for "same place"—in the Periodic Table.) Then, in a process known as beta decay—studied and explained by Fermi, arguably his most important achievement—an electron is emitted from the nucleus, resulting in element 93. Now, we've seen that there are no electrons in the nucleus, so how can one be emitted? Beta decay is a complex process that amounts, in essence, to a neutron being converted to a proton plus an electron, with the electron being emitted and the proton remaining behind to add one more positive charge to the 92 of uranium. (A small neutral particle is also emitted, which Fermi named, using the Italian diminutive, the "neutrino.") Well, element 93 was expected. But what happened, we now know, is that the neutron that was supposed to add to uranium 238 did something else: it caused the uranium 235 nucleus—which, in nature, accompanies uranium 238—to undergo fission (splitting), and the fission products obscured the results. At the time, no one even knew there *was* such a thing as fission.

So when Fermi was awarded the 1938 Nobel Prize for producing new radioactive elements, it was based on a misapprehension. But the Nobel committee had the right man. Fermi was one of the greats among

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Nobelists. His theory of beta decay alone warranted a prize. And we must not forget that it was Fermi's team, working under the stands of the University of Chicago's football stadium in 1942, that produced the first chain reaction—a major step in developing the atomic bomb. Nobel laureate Arthur Compton's cryptic telephone message relaying Fermi's attainment of a self-sustaining chain reaction—"The Italian navigator has just landed in the new world"—is to physics history what the words of Nathan Hale or Patrick Henry are to American history, as is the response of Harvard president James Conant, one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's top science advisers: "Were the natives friendly?"

Fermi's relation to Einstein, by the way, transcends their mutual occupancy of the right-man-wrong-work category. Fission, which Fermi hadn't realized he'd achieved in his "transuranic elements" research, was what he *did* use in producing the first chain reaction. And the tremendous energy released in fission—and the chain reaction—is based on Einstein's $E=mc^2$. That $E=mc^2$ is something we can take care of in a relatively short explanation.

When uranium undergoes fission, its nucleus splits into two large fragments, each an element roughly in the middle of the Periodic Table, plus two or three neutrons. If each of the, say, three neutrons hits another uranium nucleus, it induces that nucleus to undergo fission, resulting in two large fragments and three neutrons, for a total of nine neutrons. If, now, each of the nine neutrons induces fission in a uranium nucleus, we get three more neutrons from each fission, giving a total of nine times three (or twenty-seven) neutrons. If these twenty-seven induce fission, the result is twenty-seven times three (or eighty-one) neutrons, and so on. This is the chain reaction.

If we then consider the mass of the uranium nucleus and compare it with the total mass of the fission products, the two large fragments plus three neutrons, we find that the mass of the original uranium nucleus is greater than the mass of the sum of the parts. The "missing" mass has been converted to energy according to $E=mc^2$, where E stands for energy, m for mass, and c is the speed of light, a very large number. Quantitatively, the energy from a nuclear reaction like fission is a million times greater than the energy from a chemical reaction such as burning coal. (Chemical reactions involve only the electrons outside the nucleus, not the nucleus itself.)

For the benefit of those who are worrying about chain reactions popping off wherever there is uranium, the answer is: it is hard to make a bomb. In order for the three neutrons produced in the fission of a nucleus to find three other uranium nuclei to induce to split, one must have very pure uranium 235 or uranium 238, not a mixture. This purity is extremely difficult to achieve, and constituted one of the major hurdles in developing the atomic bomb (which should more accurately be called a nuclear bomb). Then, too, there must be the right amount of the pure material, the original "critical mass." Too little, and the neutrons go off

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into space without encountering other nuclei. Furthermore, even with the critical mass, there must be clever engineering; one doesn't like the bomb exploding in one's hands rather than on the designated target. One has to figure out, therefore, how to get, say, two smaller masses, each below critical, to come together at the proper instant to form the critical mass. But this is not a lesson in bomb making. (Controversy still surrounds Nobel laureate Werner Heisenberg's role in the German atomic bomb program—and indeed is the subject of Michael Frayn's play *Copenhagen*, which is playing to sold-out houses on Broadway. Did Heisenberg *deliberately* fail to produce a bomb, or was he simply not "good" enough? My bet is he blundered.)

Let us consider now a prize for what is, in a sense, the most important observation of all time, the imprint of creation—which nevertheless makes some people uncomfortable, not for religious reasons, but because it was an accident. There is nothing inherently wrong with accidents; serendipity is a feature of science. But judge for yourself.

In 1929, Edwin Powell Hubble—after whom the space telescope currently sending back spectacular pictures is named—found spectral evidence that the universe is expanding. Obviously this had a profound influence on cosmology, and by the late 1940s two principal theories were in competition. One, the steady state model, held that the universe had always been pretty much as it is now and that it had no beginning; matter was continuously being created at such a rate as to compensate for the decrease in mass density that accompanies an expansion. The other theory posited a beginning: our universe originated in a great explosion, the remnants of which flew out in all directions and then began to cool down. The explosion theory was contemptuously called the big bang by a proponent of the steady state. Since it is now the prevailing theory, because of the accident I am about to relate, the term is now official—an instance of contempt breeding familiarity.

Cultural factors undoubtedly enter into the acceptance or rejection of ideas. The big bang may be more acceptable to Judeo-Christian cultures than to others because it involves a "creation." It may not be so acceptable if the universe stops expanding and starts to contract, eventually, into the "big crunch," after which the scenario has it starting over again, giving us an oscillating universe. But in that case it might be attractive to cultures with mythologies of cyclical creation. Whether there is eternal expansion or oscillation depends upon the total mass in the universe, an amount not known at this moment but that may well be determined soon. Stay tuned. A steady state might appeal to cultures believing in reincarnation, or to individuals who crave stability or resist the idea that death spells the end of individual existence. However, science does not believe in "local truths" or that "my theory is as good as yours." Sooner or later, evidence accumu-

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lates, ruling out theories that do not adequately describe the natural world.

If there was an Ur-explosion, the temperature of the cooled-off remnant radiation could be calculated; it came to about three degrees on the absolute temperature scale (-270 degrees centigrade). In the mid-1960s, a group at Princeton University, led by Robert H. Dicke, prepared to build an apparatus that would detect this radiation—if it existed. Meanwhile, at nearby Bell Laboratories, Arno Penzias and Robert W. Wilson, doing research on what primarily interested Bell Labs—communications—built a large antenna for their research work. There were problems. The antenna kept picking up unwanted noise. Penzias and Wilson tried everything they could think of to get rid of the "hash," even spending the better part of a year painstakingly scouring the antenna of pigeon droppings. The hash prevailed. Then someone outside the laboratory, with a less parochial view, said he'd bet Penzias and Wilson's hash was Dicke's hoped-for pièce de résistance, the remnant of the big bang. It was, indeed, one physicist's meat—Dicke's—but it was hardly the others' poison. In 1978 Penzias and Wilson shared a Nobel Prize for detecting the evidence of the birth of the universe. Some have felt uneasy about that award because the recipients hadn't set out to find what they found; when they found it, they tried to get rid of it; and then they had to be told what they'd found. But the award was warranted because it was Penzias and Wilson who, by meticulous and persistent labors, had done the detecting.

The Penzias-Wilson story has a postscript, which may be symbolic. Penzias purportedly related it in a public lecture. Some weeks before the Nobel awards ceremony, he went to his neighborhood old-world tailor to order a tailcoat. "Dey don't vear tails," was the heavily accented response. "I need tails," Penzias insisted. "Dey *don't vear tails* anymore," the tailor said, equally adamant. When Penzias persisted, the tailor demanded to know why. Penzias said he was going to Sweden to get a prize. "Vat kind prize?" When Penzias said, "The Nobel Prize," the tailor gasped, "Isaac Bashevis Singer!" Singer was the literature recipient that year.

Now let's look at some work for which one laureate *didn't* get his prize. Luis W. Alvarez was the 1968 physics recipient for his studies of subatomic particles and techniques for detecting them. Interesting work—to physicists. In addition to the mental agility necessary for his research, however, Alvarez possessed a broader imagination, which took him to areas more interesting to the public. To determine whether there were hidden chambers in the Second Pyramid of Chephren, he set up detectors for cosmic particles traveling through the pyramid. In those directions where more particles were detected, so the argument went, more were coming through because of holes (chambers) in the solid material. With his non-invasive technique, Alvarez established that no hidden chambers existed. As a pilot, he designed the first bad-weather

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landing system. By analyzing movie film taken with a handheld camera by a bystander, Abraham Zapruder, he helped verify the Warren Commission's estimate of the number of shots fired in the Kennedy assassination. (This film was recently sold to the U.S. government by Zapruder's heirs for sixteen million dollars, the largest sum ever paid for an American historical artifact.) Toward the end of his career, Alvarez made the headlines because of a nasty dispute with paleontologists—he was not very diplomatic—over the way the dinosaurs had been wiped out sixty-five million years ago. Alvarez and his son Walt, a geologist, argued that a large celestial object might have hit the Earth, sending up a cloud of dust and debris that enveloped the planet for several years and blocked out the sunlight required for plant growth—thus starving the dinosaurs into extinction. Paleontologists sneered, but Alvarez produced evidence of meteor material in various parts of the world in sediments sixty-five million years old. His theory was later verified by the discovery of the gigantic impact crater—under the waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

The subject of broad-ranging laureates brings me to a Nobel anecdote of my own. It is not such a big deal to have met Nobel laureates; physics is a relatively small community of about forty thousand in the United States (compare that with over half a million physicians), and during the course of a career, one meets or hears lectures by a fair fraction of them. Early in my career I had a fellowship at Oxford University, where I was to work in a laboratory headed by the physical chemist Sir Cyril N. Hinshelwood. Hinshelwood's interests were extremely wide, both in his work on the kinetics of reactions, for which he won a Nobel Prize, and outside his field as well. He was the only person to have headed both the Royal Society (Britain's venerable scientific academy) and the Royal Society of the Arts, and he was fluent in many languages—though he did begin a lecture in Russian with "Ladies' Room and Gentlemen's Room," having refreshed his memory of the terms of address by consulting doors. The scientist I was to work under made a great fuss over my introduction to Professor Hinshelwood. This being England, with its canons of formality, I rehearsed a little speech outlining the work I was to do. Finally, on the appointed day, my mentor ushered me into Hinshelwood's office. The professor rose and came toward us. I was introduced. I could see Hinshelwood's hand extending toward me. I extended my own, expecting a handshake. But Hinshelwood's stopped in mid-extension, palm up, as he intoned, "Five shillings, please." That was the fee for a key to the laboratory. It was also the extent of the interview. I never got to deliver my speech. I learned afterward that, comfortable as he was with sciences, languages, and the arts, Hinshelwood was not comfortable with women.

On women: two Nobel awards have been cited as examples of discrimination in the selection process. One is the case of Rosalind Franklin, whose X-ray work enabled Francis Crick and James Watson to arrive at their

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double-helix picture of DNA, and who did not share in the prize they received in 1962. However, Franklin had died before the selection was made, and the prize is not awarded posthumously. The other case involved Jocelyn Bell, whose sharp eyes spotted the blips on reams of computer printout that formed the signature of pulsars. Although it was she who discerned the blips, she was a graduate student at the time, and the 1974 prize in physics went to senior researchers Antony Hewish and Sir Martin Ryle.

Graduate students are normally given an assignment as part of their training, particularly in experimental research, in which they act as "hands" on a project devised and designed by senior scientists. Since it is understood that they often have an incomplete grasp of a problem, students are rarely considered as potential recipients of the Nobel Prize, though they may have participated in the work that led to it. That assumption did not apply in Bell's case, since Hewish, her mentor, had certainly not planned to discover pulsars. His citation, which mentioned pulsars, was for pioneering research in radio astrophysics; that is, for work broader than the discovery of pulsars.

Offhand, I can think of four students who might have deserved Nobel recognition in physics, the other three being men. So if there has been discrimination, it was against students as a class—which can presumably be justified by "they know not yet whereof they speak."

Serious studies can be (and have been) made of how the allocation of Nobel Prizes reflects national leadership in science. Before World War I, Germany received the bulk of the science prizes. Since World War II, the United States has led, with many of the postwar prizes going to refugees from Germany. Why is it that some large countries have produced so few laureates, while some small ones are over-represented? Mine is not a serious study, however, and my own brand of physics-cum-New-York-cum-female pride prompts me to point out, first, that New York's City College has produced more laureates than most *countries*—as has the Bronx High School of Science! Second, in addition to the numerous physicists who were awarded the Nobel Prize in chemistry because certain research had greater application to that field, many Nobel Prizes in physiology or medicine have gone to physicists. These include one to the inventor of the CAT scan; several to physicists who switched to biology as mature scientists; some to physicists who worked with biologists, such as Francis Crick, or Rosalyn Yalow, who worked with a physician on the immunoassay, a diagnostic tool. (Basking in his wife's reflected glory, Yalow's husband boasted of his "gilt by association.")

But the award that gives me the greatest pleasure, because it crosses the snowy divide between the two cultures, is the one awarded in 1970 to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. This Nobel laureate in literature supported himself, before he became famous, by teaching physics!

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Berkeley's Right Angles

A Social Science Ideal in Perpendicular Stucco

TODD GITLIN

When I moved into my office at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1978, my colleague and former professor Bob Blauner said to me, "The best thing about having an office in Barrows Hall is that when you look out the window you can't see Barrows Hall."

How right he was. Gazing out my fourth-floor window on the south side of the building during idle moments over the next sixteen years, I felt grateful for the distant silhouette of the Oakland skyline, such as it was, and even more for the green playing field below, where each spring teams of women played some impressive baseball—a recurrent reminder that frozen customs may, eventually, be melted away. From the offices on the north side of Barrows, the view was of the stately campanile rising at the center of the campus, a Berkeley trademark and marvel, an elegant reminder that the campus had once aspired to a Renaissance ideal, that it wished to continue an elegant history of learning. Nowhere from the windows did one perceive Barrows's stark perpendiculars and sharp edges, which, seen from outside, gouged into views of the rounded hills nearby and loomed over the older buildings. All the window views offered a certain compensation, relief from the major feature of Barrows Hall: right angles.

Featureless right angles, in fact. Right angles without adornment, variation, or history. Right angles conveying the look of fixed logic, a firm

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declaration of how things were, paying tribute to an idea that had prevailed during the glory years of post–World War II reconstruction—an idea of straight-line rationality, inevitable and *good for you.* People feel diminished in Barrows: dwarfed, exposed, and straitened. Overall, the building looks like the housing—the barracks, perhaps—for a vertically organized, squared-off society that exists in a permanent, featureless present, an organizational order in which the preeminent form of life is bureaucracy, in which the bureau is the thing, the place where rules are followed and the individual occupant is an interchangeable player who struts and frets his hour at his (or, increasingly, her) desk. On the outside is unmodulated, pre-postmodern stucco, pale yellow, as if in feeble imitation of summer's dry California hills. Even the pillars are rectilinear. On the inside, a managed space, all business, an embodiment of technocratic order from which rationalized people, properly educated, are supposed to emerge to administer society more rationally. Everywhere, straight lines. It does not look like a place where imagination will flourish. Some unwilling occupants liken it to a Holiday Inn, others to a Soviet-style hotel. Life is elsewhere, this building declares.

The interior of each of the fifty-some offices on each floor is a predictably rectilinear space that is not, in itself, oppressive. It is, as they say, functional, the function being a face-to-face encounter of professor and students with relative, though uninspired, ease. Importing their own rugs, posters, photos, postcards, and cartoons to fill their blank spaces with traces of individuality, members of the faculty struggle to impose some sense that the building belongs to them, the scholars, rather than to some pure and abstract administratariat whose boxes ("slots") they fill. Sometimes they succeed, sometimes they fail, but in the end, all are defeated by the corridors.

The sense of disappointment, even malaise, so widely felt in this building comes mostly from what one has to get through in order to make one's way into an office. The most remarkable feature is the straight, carpetless corridor on each of the six floors (the first was devoted to classrooms, the eighth to an unwelcoming lecture-size room)—colorless linoleum alleys running the whole length of the building, with crossings connecting them exactly twice, once at the west end, the other almost all the way down at the east. Down these corridors march the faculty's office doors, relentlessly equidistant. The halls are a space made to get through—a space with no variation, no character, no specificity of its own. A placeless place, looking like nowhere in particular, its function solely to move people from one end to another, a tunnel. (One year, when Arlie Hochschild was acting chair of sociology, she mounted travel posters on the corridor walls, but they came to look sad, with the unintended effect of underscoring the overall grimness.) The structure places

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no value on sensuous perception; on surprise; on the tactile, auditory, or visual experience of people who exist in a place, in a material world, on earth. Students waiting to see professors have no benches, couches, or even rudimentary chairs, but sit on the floor or lean awkwardly against walls, neither their comfort nor their emotion having been taken into account. Adding to the inconvenience, there is one bathroom per floor—men's, in the case of sociology, the most female of the social sciences.

I am not the only person to have walked those halls feeling a certain urgency to leave them. Colleagues commonly comment on their awfulness. Flaneurs have no place in Barrows Hall. It is a place for purposeful people pursuing their purposes. Even people who might be pleased to see each other coming down the corridor feel somehow embarrassed. It is as if they have been caught out, have perpetrated some violation, as if the fact of being seen there betrays some dignity. At the east end of each floor is a common room for department colloquia, receptions, and such, where a few armchairs are installed and efforts are made to convey a congenial mood for plain hanging out. This being a public university, there are not many funds for amenities. One year sociology benefited from a private grant conferred by visiting professor Eli Sagan, and those funds provided a mixing place for graduate students. But the feeling persisted in most of the building that students were there on sufferance, redundant. Down those bland corridors passed students, faculty, and staff, each visible but unidentifiable from a long way off, generating not only anticipation but a state of diffuse anxiety. From down the hall, you cannot discern who approaches and cannot pretend not to notice, either. You might find yourself walking toward Professor X, who curiously does not respond to greetings, or the eminent Professor Y, who knew, and knew you knew, that he lied in reporting on a committee decision when you were a junior committee member afraid to blow the whistle on him. Yet there is no avoiding either X or Y. The prevailing sense of alienation and awkwardness, the sense that humans were destined to be uneasy in each other's company, might well have made an impression on sociology's great analyst of public estrangement, Erving Goffman, who once had his office here.

Barrows Hall seems to have been designed by architects (Aleck L. Wilson & Associates of San Francisco—a firm not listed in today's phone book) with no feeling for the texture and pleasure of everyday life, even the everyday life of people who pass their working lives in and between offices. It was as if they had never imagined a space for conviviality. They had thought about offices and the single common room per floor, but Barrows Hall, eight stone-faced stories of pure rectilinearity dwarfing the neoclassical Sproul Hall just across the driveway, is not a random mistake, pure incompetence in action. It has all the charm and

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vitality of the formally rational technocracy that it was intended to house and train. This brownish stack of offices piled high and stark was, and remains, the embodiment of an idea—that repetitious order is rational. Opening for business in 1964, Barrows contained the political science, economics, and sociology departments, as well as the business school (which subsequently acquired its own more user-friendly building elsewhere on the campus).

The building opened, it is not irrelevant to note, in the same year the Free Speech Movement turned campus society upside down. Cunning-of-history buffs take note: the concentration of the social sciences in Barrows Hall probably played a certain part in engendering that very movement. As the sociologist Max Heirich pointed out in *The Beginning: Berkeley 1964*, the erection of Barrows was part of the larger process of growth and specialization to which university president Clark Kerr (in a famous Godkin Lecture at Harvard) tendered the term "multiversity." Geographically, campus life was being dispersed, from the center marked by the campanile and Doe Library to the periphery. Barrows went up just behind Sproul Hall, the main administration building, while a new student union had been built across from Sproul's becolumned entrance, and between the two, the large, open Sproul Plaza became a central gathering space—an actual plaza. For students emerging from Barrows, that space was en route to lunch. So the building that looked like the incarnation of the world of the Organization Man was adapted—still is occasionally adapted—as a feeder for protest against the policies of a huge organization.

Even at normal times, it would be a mistake to say that Barrows trained, or presupposed, what C. Wright Mills called "cheerful robots." Buildings like this were intended to house the future professionals and managers of the postwar military-industrial-corporate order. But there was a paradox: instead of exalting the upwardly mobile, it cut them down to size. It inspired disgruntlement, if that is the right word—a sense that university life was not something to be experienced deeply in its own right but was a sort of training camp. The inhabitants of Barrows Hall were not so cheerful to be there, and if they were cheerful in later life, it would be partly because they were free of Barrows Hall. During their years in the building, they were most likely to display high spirits in the elevators. The most confident and cheerful inhabitants belonged to the business school, which in the eighties and nineties was clearly the place to be. The business school dominated the vestibule with easels announcing talks by recruiters from the likes of Bank of America and Procter & Gamble. People in jackets and ties (unusual for the Berkeley campus) headed for the third and fifth floors, where business schoolers were buoyant, exuding a sense that they were going somewhere, that rationally administered order was designed to work to their advantage. The econo-

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mists and political scientists tended to be intermediate in mood. Least exuberant were the sociologists-in-training, who, in the seventies and eighties, had the slightly put-upon look of people who suspect that the world is not going their way. If this was what modernism felt like, this grotesque caricature of methodical order, it is no wonder that by the late eighties the most adventuresome graduate students in sociology were tethered to the postmodern—Frenchified in theory, elevating identity groups to the highest of social standings—as if the reputation of universalism had been tainted once and for all by the frozen rectilinearity of Barrows Hall.

Barrows Hall is no unique excrescence. Its likes are to be found scattered around the Berkeley campus and elsewhere within and beyond the boundaries of the United States. Degraded, brutalist modernism prevailed in the 1960s partly because it was cheap, partly because it exuded efficiency in the narrowest of senses, partly because it enshrined a certain model of power. One need not be a devotee of Michel Foucault to be impressed by the building's peculiar relation to America's self-understanding during the Cold War—a justification of American power, yet a disturbing failure, an anticlimax. American civilization as grid, as calculated order—this idea was not identical with an imperial ideal, as many radicals thought; but an ideal of rationality and a history of rapacity did, and do, share a common history. Little known to most people who stride through the corridors of Barrows Hall is the Barrows Room, housing artifacts of the building's namesake, General David Prescott Barrows, who, it turned out, had lived a rather illustrious life. He was Secretary of Education in the Philippines during the American occupation after the Spanish-American War; commander of troops in World War I and the anti-Bolshevik campaign in Siberia that followed it; the ninth president of the University of California, from 1919 to 1923; author of *History of the Philippines*; and professor of Philippine history. He was known for riding a white horse. In 1934, when martial law was declared to put down a strike on the San Francisco waterfront, Barrows commanded the National Guards of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and part of Oregon. On the wall of the Barrows Room is a certificate signed by President William Howard Taft appointing David Prescott Barrows "Superintendent of Non-Christian Tribes" in Manila.

The significance of a name can be exaggerated, of course. Here it is of some interest that the adamant, impersonal Barrows Hall bears a curious resemblance to Harvard's William James Hall, which is almost twice as tall, opened the same year, and was named for a figure of renown quite different from General Barrows. William James, a contemporary of Barrows, opposed the Spanish-American War. William James Hall, housing the sociology and psychology departments, was designed by Minoru

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Yamasaki, best known later on for New York City's World Trade Center towers, but also responsible for St. Louis's Pruitt-Igoe public housing project, the first high-rise ever dynamited in an act of public apology, having been dubbed "a complete and colossal failure" by the city's mayor. At the time they were designed, neither Barrows Hall nor William James Hall benefited much from the advice or consent of those who would occupy them. Yet they housed what were then the top-ranked sociology departments in the country. The lack of consultation is a measure of the discipline's actual standing in the material world.

Finally, it is not the honorific but the physique of a building that matters, and there may well be unintended consequences. A flat-footedly ugly building, scarring the view of the rounded hills, disrupting the scale of the surrounding buildings and fields, may make a visitor, even a passerby, wonder about how such ugliness comes to pass. So, for two generations now, Barrows Hall has invited reflection on the costs of the rationalist utopia.

One colleague of mine, well known as a Marxist, for years kept posted on his Barrows Hall office door the text of a broadside from a radical Berkeley magazine of 1967, taking note that the building incarnated the technocratic vision that was then under attack by the student movement. The protesting article asserted that, early in Barrows Hall's history, a student had jumped to his death from a balcony. In the hyperbole of the time, the author interpreted this act as a direct product, and critique, of the technocratic vision. A bit farfetched—as if the hundreds of suicides from the Golden Gate Bridge constituted architectural criticism. And yet this broadside haunting the fourth-floor corridor properly invited reflection about the costs of a civilization that worships straight (or, as we would now say, bottom) lines. So by a turn of the screw, perhaps Barrows Hall, in all its crudity and ugliness, proved useful—not as an inspiration for a way of life, but as its opposite.

I was sitting in my Barrows office on October 17, 1989, at 5:04 P.M., when the man on the other end of the phone, in San Francisco, suddenly interrupted himself and yelled, "That's a big shaker!" and the phone went dead. A second later, Barrows Hall swayed and swayed, side to side, for uncountable seconds (minutes? hours?) and somehow kept on standing. As I rushed down the stairs into a blissfully aromatic day, I couldn't help feeling reprieved. That was the Loma Prieta earthquake, which occasioned all manner of thoughts about fragility, thoughts that my colleagues still inhabiting Barrows Hall continue to harbor, most acutely, as they imagine the floors above crashing into their space. Years later, the university is getting around to retrofitting Barrows for seismic protection. So that pure representation of a mistaken way of life is likely to stand.

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Looking for Farley

WILLIAM BORDEN

And you do so often read about it as if it were there.
—Gertrude Stein

I'm looking at a current map of Minnesota. I place my finger on Minneapolis and move northwest about 250 miles to Bemidji, a town of about ten thousand, and then I follow U.S. Highway 71 northeast twelve miles to Turtle River Lake Road, where I live, just a mile and a half from U.S. 71.

There's an existential reassurance in being able to point to a map and say, *Here, here's where I am.* As lost as we may sometimes feel, bewildered as we might be by conundrums large and small—the meaning of life, say, or what to get your wife for her birthday—a map provides a certain reliability. A map can generally be counted on to be clear and unambiguous.

However, when I nudge my fingertip from the site of my house back to the intersection of Turtle River Lake Road and U.S. 71, I discover that, according to this up-to-date, official state map, there is a town at this intersection: the town of Farley, Minnesota.

I've been driving through this intersection for ten years. There's no Farley there.

There are a couple of new houses. There's an old railroad bed, now a hiking trail in summer and a snowmobile trail in winter. But there's no sign of a town.

What happened to Farley? And why is it still on the map?

One of the houses that sits where Farley is supposed to be belongs to Jeff Burger. Jeff's a large, sturdy, soft-spoken artist, a ceramicist. His long black hair falls to his shoulders. He has an amiable face and a wry smile.

William Borden's most recent works are *Superstoe*, a novel; *Eurydice's Song*, a book-length poem; and *Turtle Island Blues*, a play. Borden is Chester Fritz Distinguished Professor of English Emeritus at the University of North Dakota and fiction editor of the *North Dakota Quarterly*.

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He makes his living building houses. He built his modest new home and a studio nearby. There are a couple of outbuildings, a shed, some rusting farm machinery. It's a warm Sunday morning in September. He's in his garden, which looks a bit wild and overgrown, and he's picking tomatoes. He has a couple of buckets full. He's wearing jeans cut off at the thighs and knee-high rubber boots. The vines and grass are wet with dew.

His property, which comprises most of the old Farley townsite, belonged to his father. His grandmother lived in Farley when she was a little girl. He often finds artifacts from the town—dishes, cups, spoons, harness buckles, horseshoes, and the metal stamps with which timber companies marked logs.

He shows me the 1996 Beltrami County Historical Society Calendar, which displays a photo of Farley "in the early 1900's." A dirt street runs from left to right, intersected by another dirt street that disappears into the distance. The railroad track runs from left to right. The track helps us orient ourselves, because the roadbed of the old line, the Minnesota & International Railway, now the hiking and snowmobile trail, runs beside U.S. 71, and it looks as if U.S. 71 was laid down over the old dirt road. The other dirt road must now be the paved Turtle River Lake Road.

On the left in the photo there's an undistinguished three-story white frame building, identified as the Blakely Hotel, with a fence around it. Four men seem to be passing the time beside the fence, and at the corner two children are playing on a swing set. There's a gas lamppost on the corner and, beside it, a telegraph or telephone pole. A half-dozen unpainted wooden buildings that one could describe as either rugged or dilapidated are scattered about. In the background, a tall red pine rises. Jeff gestures to the red pine in his yard, a few feet from where we're standing. "That's the same tree," he says. "It's over a hundred years old."

I look at the sturdy tree. I gaze out across the gently rolling hills of pasture. I try to imagine a town. I can't.

What happened to Farley? And how did Farley come to be in the first place?

> *From Cass Lake we paddled up Turtle River into Turtle River Lake, where we were to investigate the timber and see what it was like. We understood that Weyerhauser liked white pine, and we found a lot of it there.*
>
> —Timber surveyor, 1890s

The story of Farley, I discover, is also the story of Turtle River, which is also on the map—a town that still exists, sort of, located a mere mile from Farley.

In the nineteenth century, northern Minnesota was one great forest, and in the minds of many, God had made all those trees so they could be chopped down and turned into telegraph poles, railroad ties, houses, and

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rolltop desks. All that was needed was a railroad to get the chopped-down trees to a sawmill.

John J. Hill's Northern Pacific tracks crawled north from St. Paul. Where the railroad went—or where the lumber entrepreneurs thought the tracks were going to go—speculators bought timberland and merchants built towns. The settlers and lumberjacks followed. The saloons and the whorehouses followed the lumberjacks.

By the 1890s the railroad reached Bemidji. From Bemidji the Minnesota & International Railway, a subsidiary of the Northern Pacific, worked its way ten miles northeast to Turtle River Lake, where the village of Turtle looked out over the tree-lined blue water. About fifty people lived in Turtle, including A. O. Johnson, who had the store and post office, and Peter Larkin. The trouble was, Turtle was on the south arm of the Y-shaped lake, while the M&I track ran by the north arm, several miles away. Without the railroad, Turtle had no future. So they moved the town.

Those founders who had moved from the old town of Turtle were quickly joined by other business people, speculators, and families. Soon there were over a hundred homes. A. O. Johnson, who was elected president of the new town council, and Peter Larkin each built a general store. Along Main Street you would also find F. Davis's Notions, Tinware, Glassware, Tobacco, and Fine Cigars; Silver Bros. Real Estate; J. A. Carpenter, Land & Claim Attorney; and Knappen's Store, which sold fence posts, telegraph poles, railroad ties, flannel shirts, and German stockings.

For the traveler there were the Lakeland Hotel & Restaurant and the International Hotel, run by Joe McTaggart, who threw a Grand Ball and Supper on Christmas Eve, 1901, for which the *Bemidji Pioneer* predicted "a jolly crowd . . . as Joe never does anything by halves." The next year Joe held a masquerade ball on New Year's Eve. By then Turtle River boasted a wooden sidewalk, an eight-man town pump with six hundred feet of hose, a fire brigade, a barbershop, a sawmill, and a dozen saloons, including Larkin and Dale's Saloon and Hotel. The town also had a jail and a number of whorehouses. Among the ladies of easy virtue were Bill Bell's Lady and Tin Can Annie, who got her name because every day she carried a pail of cold beer from the saloon back to her workplace.

> *We went swimming twice a day. We went around by the sawmill and watched it saw logs. The smell of green lumber was in the air.*
> —Carl Otterstad, *Reminiscences 1895–1930*

C. C. Knappen, a journalist writing about summer resorts along the Great Northern route (drumming up business for both the resorts and the railroad), settled in Turtle River with his family and started a newspaper, the *Turtle River Pine Tree*. Stanley Moorhead was editor.

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Moorhead, described as "half Indian," came to Turtle River from Grand Forks, North Dakota, and was regularly elected recorder of the town council.

Moorhead, Johnson, and Larkin were re-elected annually to the town council and seem to have been the movers and shakers of Turtle River. They were not shy about scratching each other's backs. The liquor license for Larkin and Dale's Saloon was always approved and noted in the minutes of the council meeting. Moorhead printed the minutes of the council meetings and was appointed fire warden. When it was decided that the village needed a jail ("cells 6 x 8 ft, 1 brick chimney, windows & cell doors barred with 3/4 inch iron"), the land was leased from Johnson. Johnson was also appointed health inspector and then paid two dollars for his annual inspection of the "lockup."

A. O. Johnson was not only president of the Turtle River Town Council (and would be re-elected to that post for several years), he also owned, according to the *Pine Tree,* three-fourths of the Turtle River townsite, 200 acres in all. He knew how to have fun, too. The *Pine Tree* reports him dancing all night at the lakeshore celebration of a couple's wedding anniversary. And he liked to take friends and family out onto Turtle River Lake in his twelve-person sailboat.

Pete Larkin was a short, pudgy man who wore a black suit and a soft black felt hat pulled toward one eye. He chewed an unlit cigar in the corner of his mouth, and he "walked with a slow, steady, independent gait," according to the schoolteacher, Carolyn Groves. "He was friendly," she said, "with a sense of humor, demanded respect and got it." Besides the store and saloon, he had a horse barn and a livery stable. Later he operated a potato warehouse and dabbled in the lumber business, buying and scaling logs from settlers as they cleared their land for farming.

One evening, before closing, a man tried to hold up Larkin's store. The customers hit the floor, but Larkin jumped the man and struggled with him until he fled. Larkin was shot, but he recovered. He was a hero after that.

> *Hundreds of men are working on the drive, others are engaged in sorting and hoisting logs, others are operating boats on the lakes. . . . For employment at good wages, the woods beats the prairie country at every season.*
>
> —The Farley Telegram

One of the early newcomers to Turtle River was William Blakely, a Canadian from New Brunswick who came to Minnesota in the 1890s and ran lumber camps for various companies. When he discovered in 1895 that Weyerhauser had neglected to grab forest land near Woman Lake, he talked Everett Farley into putting up the money for the timber,

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and the two joined forces. By 1900 they had bought up logging contracts around Cass Lake, and they bought the three-hundred-horsepower steamboat *Zelah May*, which they used to tow logs across the lake.

Soon Blakely was buying up logging rights around Turtle River, where there were fine stands of tall, straight white pine. Blakely's purchases went fine until he tried to buy logging rights from two Turtle River men, Costello and Hoolihan. They wanted concessions he wouldn't agree to, and, either out of pique or to circumvent some legality, Blakely moved his headquarters a mile up the tracks.

Everett Farley moved with him. Farley had started out in the 1890s as a bookkeeper for the Price Brothers Logging Company. He must have had a sense of humor as well as a gift for creative accounting. He told the Price brothers that he had embezzled five hundred dollars of their money and challenged them to find the discrepancy in the books. The auditor couldn't discover the deficit, so Farley got to keep the money—which he probably used to gamble, for he was an enthusiastic gambler. He once won twenty-six thousand dollars in Minneapolis.

So Blakely and Farley started a new town, a competitor to Turtle River, only a few minutes farther on the rail line, and they called it—well, what would they call it? Blakely? Farley? One account has them tossing a coin, another tossing dice. Either way, Farley won.

> *W. G. Knott wishes to announce to the people of Farley and vicinity that he has opened a first class restaurant. And solicit a share of your patronage. Mr. Knott is a gentleman in every respect and deserves a good trade, which he will be sure to get. Be sure and ask for the Mint Restaurant.*
>
> —The Farley Telegram

Farley grew even more quickly than Turtle River. In 1901 Blakely & Farley moved their office and warehouse from Bemidji to Farley. A hundred thousand dollars' worth of goods went through the warehouse that year. By then the Blakely & Farley Lumber Company was the largest in the region. With contracts for one hundred million feet of lumber, it hired two thousand men and set up thirty lumber camps. (Other companies in the area had one to six camps and hired at most five hundred men.) The logs were hauled to the Turtle River and slid onto the ice. In the spring they floated into sixteen-hundred-acre Turtle River Lake until it was filled with logs—ninety million feet of them, by one estimate.

Now the trains were stopping at the Farley depot, as well as the Turtle River station. Farley had its own weekly newspaper, *The Farley Telegram* ($1.50 a year, in advance), and its requisite complement of houses of ill fame, including Fannie Wilson's Dakota Club. It had eleven saloons

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(to Turtle River's nine), including the Lumberman's Home, the Bodega, the Club, the Stockholm, the Pioneer, the Mint, the Ironclad Hotel & Restaurant, Walt McDonald's Turf Exchange Bar, and F. X. Dufour's The New Palace. Farley had the only doctor, J. R. Brown, and the only hospital north of Bemidji. Dr. Brown installed a sixteen-plate X-ray static machine, believed to be the only one in northern Minnesota. Farley was the first of the two towns to build a church, utilized by the itinerant preachers, called "sky pilots," who came through to preach to the lumberjacks. One of the sky pilots, Frank Higgins, stayed to establish a Presbyterian church.

GOOD TIME AT FARLEY
Excursion to That Town Friday Evening
the Star Event of the Season
THE CITIZENS OF FARLEY ROYALLY ENTERTAIN
Everyone More Than Pleased

—Bemidji Pioneer

On January 24, 1902, a special excursion train took two hundred celebrants from Bemidji to Farley ("the Ninety-Day Village Wonder of the North" in the words of the *Bemidji Pioneer*) for the opening extravaganza of the seventeen-thousand-dollar Hotel Blakely (rooms two dollars a night), lit by electricity and warmed by steam heat. The Bemidji band played, and dinner consisted of "the choicest viands that can be gotten together by one of the best chefs in the state. Nothing like it has ever before been seen in this section of Minnesota." After supper they danced until four in the morning, slept briefly, then took the train back to Bemidji. The special cut-rate fare was seventy-five cents, and the ride took forty minutes.

In August, Blakely & Farley's steamship on Cass Lake provided another grand excursion. A special train took the Bemidjiites and the Bemidji band the thirty miles to Cass Lake, where they boarded the 115-foot *Zelah May*, which boasted a dance hall forty feet by twenty. The steamer crossed Cass Lake, wended its way on the Mississippi to Lake Winnibigosh, and docked at the Ojibwe village of Winnibigosh. The *Pioneer* pronounced the *Zelah May*, which could carry 450 passengers, "the finest lake-going craft in northern Minnesota. No safer or more convenient boat ever floated."

Blakely and Farley were riding high. One afternoon they took the train to Bemidji, Farley splendidly sartorial in his sealskin coat, Blakely watery-eyed as usual, and were welcomed at the depot by the town band. After that brassy tribute, they strolled down the street to Charlie Miles's saloon, where they dropped twenty thousand dollars at roulette.

Farley, however, was not without its critics.

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I've traveled East,
I've traveled West,
and I've been in North Dakota,
but the damd'st place I've ever struck
is Farley, Minnesota.
—Local lumberjack song

A hundred miles to the west, the *Crookston Journal*, skeptical of Farley's staying power, saw a town without solid foundations, "born of spite and matured with false hopes." And indeed, the town of Farley collapsed as quickly as it had burgeoned. Whereas in 1901 Blakely & Farley had thirty lumber camps, the next year they set up only thirteen. The problem wasn't finding trees to cut. The trouble was their bookkeeper, Kenneth McIver, who perhaps had learned creative accounting from Everett Farley. McIver, who was also the Farley postmaster, stole them blind.

The trouble was also William Blakely and Everett Farley themselves. According to a contemporary lumberman, Blakely & Farley "took their jobs too cheap"—that is, bought the timber and sold it too cheaply—"and eventually went broke." Another logger observed that "Blakely & Farley were a starvation outfit. They didn't pay good wages and as a rule had very poor cooks. It was pretty hard at the last for Blakely and Farley to get men; they couldn't get men." One lumberjack reported, "Bill Blakely saw me on the street and asked, 'Are you looking for a logging job?' I said, 'No, not anything you fellows have to let.'" Finally, another contemporary summed it up: "Cards, women, and wine were Blakely and Farley."

At the end of 1903, half of the buildings were empty. By 1904 both the *Farley Telegram* and the *Turtle River Pine Tree* had stopped publishing. William Blakely, no longer the high roller, hung on as postmaster until 1913, when his wife, Kittie, took over as postmistress. In 1915 the Farley Post Office was closed, and the mail went to Turtle River. In 1915 the Blakely Hotel burned down. Nothing was left of Farley.

According to one source, Everett Farley "died out west on a poor farm." I've been unable to discover what happened to William Blakely.

On motion, all houses of ill fame so conducted in said village be taxed a monthly fine of $15.00.
—Minutes of Turtle River Village Council

By 1913, Turtle River was barely holding on. The area was logged off. The railroad had reached the Canadian border, and the lumberjacks—and the saloons and the prostitutes—followed. Not even the jail was seeing any use. The council bought the jail stove for three dollars.

There wasn't even enough business for Turtle River's own Addie Kline, a woman of easy virtue who had grown up there. She moved to Bemidji,

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where she joined other *filles de joie* such as Tar Paper Belle, Black Edna, and Goldy and Humpty, who worked out of a Model T Ford. When the Great Depression hit in the 1930s, and the Civilian Conservation Corps moved in to build camps and parks, Addie outfitted an old school bus with hot and cold running water, and drove from camp to camp to give the hard-working CCC fellows a little R&R.

I hate you but call me.
—The Monks

There's no longer a Larkin and Dale's Saloon in Turtle River, but there are three other bars, out on County Road 21, a quarter-mile of tarmac known, I hope with tongue in cheek, as "Uptown Turtle River." The money they pay the town for liquor licenses keeps Turtle River, as a governmental entity, alive today. I turn off County 21, onto County 405. I drive past the Turtle River Cemetery, which still receives occupants. I turn onto a paved road, cross the M&I roadbed, and, after a few hundred yards, come to Salem Lutheran Church, where the paved road becomes washboard dirt and winds past a half dozen houses before it disappears into the trees, where twenty or so homes are hidden in the woods or scattered along Turtle River Lake. This is Turtle River today. The only suggestion of civic activity is the tiny weathered shack, just past the church, where the town council still meets once a month.

The current mayor of Turtle River is Gary Burger, Jeff Burger's uncle. Gary looks to be in his fifties, a friendly, agile musician still famous in musical circles as a member of the Monks, five ex-GIs with tonsured heads, wearing monk's robes, who toured Germany in the mid-sixties and set the stage for punk rock. The Monks' ear-splitting harmonics—described as "the Titanic scraping along an iceberg"—were discovered when Gary laid his guitar against the amp and it made, according to Gary, "this god-awful racket that sounded *so right.*" Monk historian Will Bedard writes that Gary "sought levels of dementia unknown to other guitar players of the era" and "painted twisted, Bosch-like aural hallucinations," conveying "rage in a way no punk vocalist has ever matched." Now, some thirty years later, Gary seems more mellow, his naturally bald head no longer in need of a tonsure. After the Monks dispersed, he was ready for some quiet and solitude, so he came back home and bought a rundown cabin in the woods, in what might have been a suburb of the old Turtle River village, a stone's throw or two through the trees from the shore of Turtle River Lake. The deep wagon ruts of the nineteenth-century Ojibwe trail between Leech Lake and Red Lake run behind his house. He restored the cabin and turned half of it into a state-of-the-art recording studio, where local musicians as well as singers and bands from as far away as Minneapolis and Nashville come to lay down tracks for their CDs.

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It's another sunny day in September as Gary's two dogs, a laconic older Lab and an eager puppy, greet me when I get out of my car. Gary invites me inside. A cap covers his head, stuffed birds and animals hang on the walls, and his coffee is strong and good. We talk for a while in his kitchen; then he shows me his small three-room studio, a drum set in one room, a keyboard in another, a photo of the Monks on the wall of the control room. The equipment is patched together, but it's quality. We're interrupted several times by the phone—singers and musicians wanting to set up recording dates. He checks his calendar, he quotes fees: cheaper than Minneapolis, enough for him to make a modest living, an unpredictable income any way you look at it.

I tell him I've been trying to get the scoop on Turtle River and Farley. He tells me that if I come to the next council meeting, I can probably borrow the old records.

I really am not allowed to say much about our CIA connections.
—Gary Burger, *The New Testament According to the Monks*

In the meantime, because I still don't have the answer to why Farley remains on the map, I visit the Beltrami County Courthouse in Bemidji. I'm not sure what department to look for. I don't see a sign that says "Maps" or "Missing Towns." I try a door designated "Recorder."

It looks as if I may be in luck. A large county map lies across the counter. I tell the young woman behind the counter my problem: a town listed on the map is missing. She laughs. She calls an older woman over, apparently an old-timer when it comes to maps. The three of us examine the plat map. There's Farley, all right. Yes, the older woman knows the town itself is no longer there—and she seems happily unconcerned. "But why hasn't it been taken off the map?" I ask. The discrepancy has become urgent to me. To her, however, the anomaly is all in a day's work. "No one took it off," she says lightly. "Someone has to file to change it. I guess it just was never done." "So it might stay on the map forever," I say. "It might," she agrees. She smiles. The younger woman smiles.

It's a cool evening a week later. Half a dozen cars and pickups are pulled alongside the road, which is muddy from rain earlier in the day. The door to the one-room meetinghouse is open. The table takes up most of the space. Half a dozen men, wearing caps, and one woman sit around the wooden table. I take the one empty chair, by the door. They're discussing a resident's request to have the town pay for a second driveway, because the one he has gets too muddy to drive on. They discuss putting a culvert in by the driveway; it would be a good idea anyway. But they won't pay for another driveway; one's enough for anybody.

Gary Burger runs the meeting efficiently, politely curtailing extraneous conversation, rapping his gavel when the discussion is concluded. He

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introduces me, and I explain my project. Somebody twists his chair around to open the drawer of a battered file cabinet. He pulls out a couple of large green books. Somebody recalls the time in the mid-1970s when the council got into trouble for violating the separation of church and state by letting the town plow clear the driveway to Salem Lutheran Church.

In your arms I must return!
—The Monks

A couple of weeks later I've read through the minutes and taken notes, and I visit Gary Burger again to return the book and to give him a copy of my jottings, because he's interested in knowing more about those early council meetings. Gary says the old jail is still standing, down the road past the council meetinghouse. He confides that a couple of people want to move it next to the meetinghouse and turn it into a historical attraction. I ask him if he wants a tourist attraction.

"Hell no," Gary says. "You pave those roads, people will come in, they'll cut down trees, and there goes the neighborhood. If they have to drive in over this washboard road, they won't want to live here. That's fine with me. My platform for mayoral election is No Progress. And I keep getting re-elected."

The phone rings. An aspiring folksinger wants to come in and record a demo. I finish my coffee. We shake hands. He says we'll have to get together again. I say I'd like that.

I drive out of Turtle River. I drive less than a mile. I turn onto Turtle River Lake Road, my road. I look up at the tall old red pine in Jeff Burger's yard.

I can almost imagine the all-night dance at the Hotel Blakely's grand opening, the gussied-up ladies on the front porch of Fannie Wilson's Dakota Club, the shops and stores and saloons and bawdy houses that once were there.

Almost.

I drive on through Farley.

Shut up, don't cry.
—The Monks

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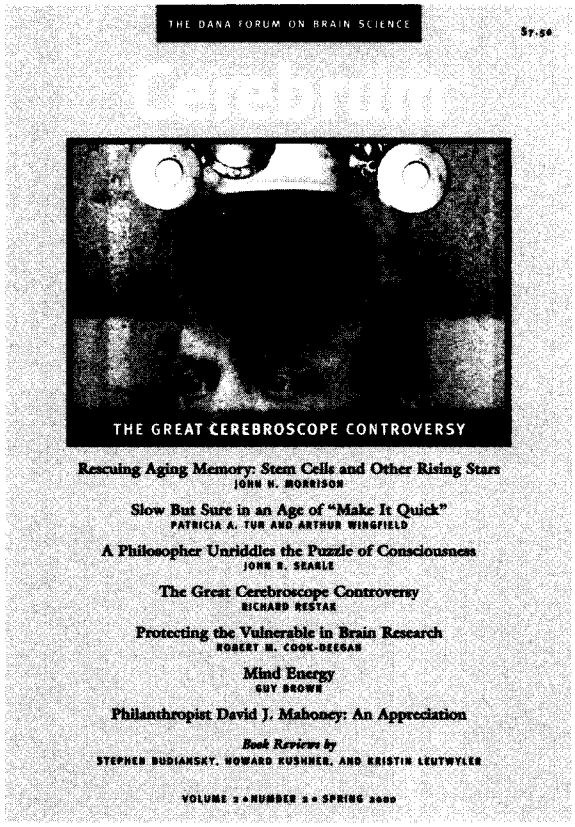

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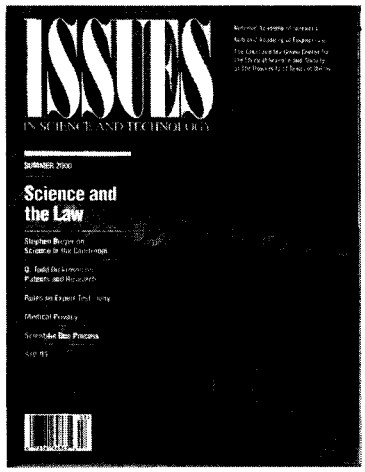

LET THEM EAT PIXELS

"The digital divide is real, but it's not nearly as important as many other inequities. Students who have less access to computers and the Net also have less access to everything else. Why among their deprivations should we focus on computers?"

Kevin Finneran
Editor's Journal
Spring 2000

TECHNOLOGY NEEDS OF AGING BABY BOOMERS

"The baby boomers are not the first generation to grow old. However, their absolute numbers will move issues associated with their aging to the top of the policy agenda.... Although people are living longer the natural aging process does affect...an individual's capacity to interact with...the physical environment. The very things that we cherished when younger, such as a home and a car, may now threaten our independence and well-being as older adults.... Therein lies the paradox: After spending billions to achieve longevity, we have not made equitable investments in the physical infrastructure necessary to ensure healthy independent living in later years."

Joseph F. Coughlin
Fall 1999

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THE UNCERTAIN ART

Is There a Doctor in the House?

SHERWIN B. NULAND

Al Capp invented a host of colorful minor characters for his acclaimed comic strip, "Li'l Abner." Whenever there is a cardiac emergency in a public place, I feel like one of them: a lugubrious little fellow over whose head a small black cloud always hovered. His name was Joe Bfstplk, the surname meant to be pronounced like a Bronx cheer. The cloud connoted disaster, and disaster was precisely what Joe brought with him everywhere he went.

My own little black cloud is heart-shaped. It has made its ominous appearance in theaters and concert halls, during transatlantic flights (note the use of the plural in each case, which should not necessarily be taken to mean merely two), and on the street. While still newly graduated, I used to think that the sentence "Is there a doctor in the house?" was the intro to some hilarious sequence in a Marx Brothers movie or a vaudeville routine. I soon learned otherwise. Some people actually do use that formula when a physician is needed in a hurry. Those are precisely the words that have ushered in some of the most memorable episodes of my life. More often than not, they have ended badly.

My first such experience seems to have presaged the future. The date was November 1961, and the occasion was the first night out together that my wife and I had spent since the birth of our daughter six weeks earlier. I had completed my specialty training at the beginning of the summer and was working hard at my new job, which was to initiate a program of open-heart surgery at a mid-sized hospital in New York. I was earning the munificent sum of $12,000 a year, a fourfold increase over the salary I had been paid during the sixth and final year of my residency at the Yale-New Haven Hospital.

Feeling flush with such unaccustomed wealth, and vaulted into an expansive mood by the nature of the occasion we were celebrating, I had splurged by buying two center-section aisle seats in the tenth row of the Booth Theater, where Julie Harris was starring in a critically hailed production of *A Shot in the Dark*. The general feeling of well-being—and financial abundance—expanded to include a romantic pre-theater dinner at an intimate café nearby, so that by the time my wife and I arrived fifteen minutes before the performance, both of us were at peace with the world and prepared to let the thespian magic of Miss Harris and her company of actors wash over us for the next two hours.

We settled into our seats, smiled beneficently at the couple alongside us, perused the program with the insouciance of two young sophisticates long accustomed to frequenting this purse-favored part of the theater, and prepared for the curtain to go up. We were feeling comfortable in every sense of the word.

All at once, the subdued conversational hubbub and bustle of that quintessential Friday-evening theater audience was pierced by the sound of a man yelling out an unintelligible sentence in a high-pitched, fretful voice. He reached the final syllable just as the pre-curtain buzz began to respond to the alarming intrusion by quickly dying down, as each of us in that vast room became quiet, straining to hear the words being shouted. The result of his momentary halt, and ours, was a deepening hush, finally so complete that the auditorium was filled with an intense silence. The aura of stillness had an eerie quality, as if, with one pair of ears, we were awaiting a sound that we had been forewarned would break a spell. The wait lasted barely a moment

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before the expectant emptiness of air was suddenly filled with the urgent blast of: "Is there a doctor in the house?" Now that I heard it clearly, I recognized that my disbelieving mind had actually understood those words the first time they entered it. Even through the babble of voices, I had known what was being said. But it seemed to make no sense.

People don't actually talk that way in real life, I was sure of that. Bursting out with such a hackneyed phrase had to be someone's idea of a practical joke, or perhaps it was the raving of a deranged man. The only problem with my thesis was that the second outcry had apparently paralyzed the members of the audience into an utter absence of motion. They were taking the loud summons seriously. All around me, men and women sat stiffly in their seats, and a few looked as though they had actually shrunk down into the plush in an attempt to hide from being called upon to do something. With all onlookers frozen this way, my vista was clear. I could now see that the source of the commotion was a uniformed usher, standing alongside an elderly man slumped onto the arm of his aisle seat in the front row of the side section.

I leaped up and bounded toward the stricken man. He was unresponsive, pulseless, and blue. His equally elderly seatmate, who I later learned was his sister, was hysterical. When I told her I was a doctor, she began to scream into my ear that he had a heart condition, as if that message itself would confer magical powers on me if repeated again and again, or perhaps would bring her brother back from what was an obvious cardiac arrest.

The treatment for cardiac arrest is external massage, but in 1961 it was thought to require two people, one to compress the breastbone and the other to force breath into the victim's mouth. It had not yet been realized that both could be done by one person, alternating the two maneuvers in appropriate sequence: cardiopulmonary resuscitation. I seized my patient by the shoulders and threw him to the carpeted floor alongside the row. The sight was too much for his sister. Sobbing violently, she rushed toward the exit.

On my knees and straddling that inert body in the center of the aisle, I began a rhythmic series of compressions on the lower part of his sternum. As I completed the first thrust, I looked up at the audience members near me, assuming that someone would come forth to do the mouth-to-mouth breathing. The astonishing sight that greeted my eyes was one not easily forgotten.

Despite the tumult that had initiated it, no one in that entire capacious place seemed prepared to admit awareness of the drama being played out within a few feet of the stage. Even when I momentarily lifted my crouching body to survey the auditorium and what was visible of the balcony, I saw not a single face, except my wife's, turned in my direction. In order not to be confronted with the obvious, each of the other audience members had suddenly discovered something to become fascinated by, something that required unwavering attention. The chandeliers were particularly popular, but the cynosure of many other eyes was one or another portion of the curtain. Some stared fixedly at a red EXIT sign; others focused intently on their programs, as though trying to memorize each printed word. These people would under no circumstances allow themselves to be distracted from their determined dissociation. I was being studiously ignored. The panicky usher had disappeared, and I was left alone in that sea of inaccessible theatergoers with only the unconscious man for company and my wife's tight-lipped imitation of a smile for encouragement.

But I was not alone for long. Perhaps the tension was proving too much for a fortyish fellow in the middle of the twelfth row. Whatever the reason, he suddenly—but not until three or four minutes had passed—pulled himself up from his seat and began clambering toward me over the unmoving legs of his neighbors, finally tripping on the inert ankles of the stolid occupant of the aisle seat, who kept staring straight ahead, trying to appear unaware of anything going on around him. On reaching my side, the new volunteer asked me, in a soft middle-European accent, what to do, and I told him. Without hesitating, he applied his lips tightly to those of our companion, and began to blow air forcefully into his gaping mouth while squeezing shut the man's two cyanotic nostrils with his fingertips.

We continued our efforts for about ten more minutes, though I had known almost

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from the start that the old man's life was beyond retrieval. But he had one more trump in him: With a single great spasm of his terminally twitching abdominal muscles—it must have been timed in perfect synchrony with an agonal contraction of his stomach—he vomited directly into the mouth of his would-be rescuer. Thus did our patient let us know that he was dead, and it was time to stop.

I got up from straddling the corpse, my dismay at the outcome of the situation somewhat lessened by its manifest inevitability. I thanked my partner and shook his hand, and then surveyed the audience again. Even now that it was safe, no one so much as glanced at us. We stood alone in that small dark circle of death, surrounded by a vast penumbra of indifference. Whatever had been found so alluring about the curtain, the chandeliers, and the EXIT signs had lost not a bit of its attraction. Hundreds of avid eyes were still glued to the program, though some of them were growing a bit glassy. Half-a-dozen policemen were bustling their way down the aisle toward us, no doubt summoned by the disappearing usher or one of his colleagues. It was then that I realized that no member of the theater's staff had appeared on the scene. After exchanging a few words with the cops, my partner and I repaired to the men's room. He rinsed his mouth over and over. We returned to our seats as unregarded as when we had left them.

A few of the theater's management people finally made an appearance. The police asked them some questions and then lifted the body off the floor to carry it out. I couldn't resist standing up to see whether even this final moment in the lethal drama would be diligently ignored by the audience. It was. A few of the curtain-starers had no doubt switched over to reading their programs, or an EXIT-sign aficionado may have turned his face up to a chandelier, but otherwise everything was just as it had been at the beginning. In that place of stony quiet, the humanity of three people had been dismissed. Throughout the entire episode, we had been more than ignored—we had been forcefully extruded from everyone's consciousness. Not until the cops and the corpse were out of the auditorium did the usual theater hubbub start up again, as though the intervening thirty minutes had not happened. The audience sat back after a bit, the curtain went up, and the show began—or at least the show that everyone had come to see.

That episode of group avoidance took place on a Friday evening at a Broadway theater. Who knows how many physicians were in the audience—ten, twenty, far more? Some of them must even have been seated within yards of the dying man, but no one came to his aid. They behaved like everyone else in that place, determined not to become involved, and in their case evading implicit responsibility. It was my first experience with this phenomenon, but hardly my last. I would see it several times more over the years, but I would more frequently see its opposite. I once attended a concert in New Haven where a man fell forward from his seat in cardiac arrest and had barely slumped to the floor before a virtual stampede of doctors rushed to his aid. I have been on an Air France flight over the Atlantic when the classic formula was shouted by a flight attendant—in both French and English, no less—and was unable to get to the patient's side because three alert physicians were already hovering over her by the time I had dashed to her section of the airplane. Those were moments of pride in my profession, but they don't make up for the few others. The few others should never have happened.

Cardiac episodes come in a variety of forms. Some are arrests, some are heart attacks from which recovery takes place, and some prove to be not really cardiac at all. Many do not end the way my first one did. And there are some that are actually funny, even ridiculous. Of these, I have had a few experiences.

In the summer of 1994, my actress wife was playing Mistress Quickly in a production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* at the Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival in Garrison, New York. The play was performed in a huge four-hundred-seat tent whose single open side faced a magnificent sloping landscape just across the river from West Point. On opening night, moments before Mistress Quickly was to appear in her big first-act scene, those ominous and too-familiar words burst forth in the stentorian baritone of the stage manager: "Is there a doctor in the house?"

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The cause of the disturbance was a woman in late middle age, leaning forward in her seat and clutching the front of her dress as though experiencing chest pain. Both of us being situated in the first row and separated only by about fifteen feet, I was able to get to her side immediately, only to have her whisper at me that she was so embarrassed by all the attention that she just wanted to get out of the theater. Because our seats were adjacent to the open side, her wish was easily accommodated by our slowly walking together a distance of no more than half-a-dozen yards until we were concealed behind the tent's heavy canvas. By the time I had helped her to lie down on the grass, another physician had come forth from the audience. He proved to be a cardiac anesthesiologist on the staff of the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center. Fate could not have been more kind. Other than to say some comforting words, not much could be done until the quickly summoned ambulance came (we would later learn that our patient had had a relatively mild coronary), but my experienced colleague's presence was reassuring. Being from the town, the ambulance driver knew not to use his siren near the theater, so the play was able to proceed after only a few minutes' delay. But I did miss my wife's first big scene.

There were forty performances of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* that season, of which I saw three more. On the final evening of the run, I returned for the last time. As usual, my younger children, a few guests, and I had an early picnic dinner on the spacious, beautifully manicured lawn. As we wandered over the grounds before going in to take our seats, my attention was caught by a corpulent man in his twenties who had obviously overindulged in both food and grog. His face was plethoric, his belly bulged against his belt, and he was staggering just a bit as he made his way toward the tent in the company of a displeased young woman who must have been his date. I was afraid he would vomit before he got there.

The final performance began. At precisely the same instant as the episode on opening night, that same powerful voice roared out those same words. Whatever the cause, I knew that I would once again miss the big speech. I quickly scanned the audience and found the cause: it was the overindulgent young man, standing at his seat and retching, his face a purplish gob of distress. He was a thoroughly repulsive sight. Though I knew that his problem was only indigestion, I also knew that I should go to him. I was frustrated, furious, and disgusted, all at the same time.

The theater had become dead quiet at the sound of the stage manager's booming summons. Only the twittering of evening birds could be heard, as everyone sat in stunned silence. I took a determined—if reluctant—step toward my duty, but not before a barnyard profanity escaped from my jangled thoughts and, at the same time, from my incautious lips. The words came forth no louder than an ordinary spoken sentence, but in that hushed space of acoustic magnifications, the mute air was shattered by the exclamation of a doctor so fed up that he couldn't contain himself: "OH SHIT!" The sound of it roared outward to fill that entire canvas-wrapped enclosure, so empty of any other human voice. I was sure the expletive could be heard for miles around. Its reverberation escaped through the open end of the tent and echoed back into the theater from the surrounding hills, or so it seemed to its mortified declaimer. Gone was any semblance of medical dignity, as the entire cast—even those standing in the wings—began to laugh uproariously, joined immediately by the audience. The stricken young man rushed from his place with both hands clapped tightly up against his mouth, hiccuping until he disappeared behind the tent. A moment later, the loathsome sound of loud vomiting could be heard, emanating through the canvas from the spot to which he had fled. He never returned, and that seemed to suit his date just fine. She stayed and enjoyed the rest of the performance, which had been halted only long enough for my cussing and his puking. I didn't miss a single Shakespearian iamb.

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JOURNAL

Writing Class

CHRISTOPHER HALLOWELL

September 3. First classes always give me the jitters. Professors who have taught for decades tell me that even they feel butterflies before the first meeting. So I, with a mere handful of years of college teaching behind me, enter Room 1150 with loudly jangling nerves. Nervousness is contagious. If my students sense my inner turmoil, I know what will happen: they'll sit there in silence, the traditional barrier between students and unknown teacher. Then they'll start crossing and recrossing their legs, tapping on their desks, doodling in their notebooks. They'll begin looking around at each other. I'll notice this. My voice will tighten as it ascends from my belly to the back of my throat. My mouth will dry out. My forehead will sweat. Then a couple of the students will start whispering. Someone will wander off to the bathroom. But the worst is yet to come: the glazing of their eyes.

Most of my eighteen students are in the room already, slouched in flimsy metal chairs with attached writing surfaces. They're a typical Baruch class. Most are in their early twenties, though a couple could be ten years older. They're Asian, black, European; only a couple look like white-bread Americans. I take a gulp and launch into my usual introduction. They listen attentively—much too attentively. What decent kids CUNY students are! They're so different from the unruly and uncaring products of the New York City public school system that I'm always reading about in the paper. These students are here to better themselves against difficult odds—poverty, broken families, teenage motherhood, abusive parents, night jobs. Half don't even speak English properly, but here they are, trying to meld themselves into America.

One of the best things about teaching in a place like Baruch is that its students are rough gems—at least some of them. Like middle schoolers, in contrast to hardened high school kids, they can be encouraged to open up in this new milieu. It is my responsibility to abet this fragile process. One hard-eyed glance from me, one hint of exasperation in my voice, and they'll vanish behind their masks like prairie dogs down a hole.

September 8. Who are these students? I'd better find out fast because they look about the same today as they did last week: like lumps of shapeless clay. Here are a few of the little autobiographies that I asked them to write over the weekend.

Sametta. Emigrated from Liberia when she was in fifth grade; the kids in her Brooklyn middle school rode her mercilessly for her strange accent and dress. Her college friends, by contrast, admire her because "I have my head on my shoulders to be so young. . . . I think what they mean is that I am more mature than my age and my conversations are way too deep. You want to know something? I totally agree with what these people tell me."

Sal. A senior majoring in Operations Management who informs me that he is taking this course only because "it fits perfectly into my schedule" and warns me that he has "a bad tendency to drop classes."

Armel. "I was born in South Africa and grew up during the era of apartheid, enjoying the

Christopher Hallowell's books include *Father to the Man* and *Growing Old, Staying Young*. Hallowell is the director of the undergraduate journalism program at Baruch College, part of the City University of New York. He kept this journal last fall while teaching a course in first-person journalism.

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luxuries and standard of living that only such a harsh system could provide. . . . I think the most unique/interesting thing about me is the extent of my travels and the fact that I have family scattered throughout Europe and the Middle East."

Desmond. An Indian whose parents emigrated from Guyana; until recently he had never left Queens. "I'm not a particularly interesting person, in fact, suffice it to say, my life is pretty dull. . . . I'm pretty much like the average person in this school. Half the day I spend working, the other half I spend at school."

Judy. "I am 25 years old and married. I was born and raised in Hungary from where I came, and immigrated to the United States in 1994. . . . I find it extremely difficult to fit in, to find new friends, or to accept the supposition that I should be the happiest person alive for being able to live in the United States."

Hélène. A young French woman who dresses with a flair uncharacteristic of Baruch students. She says she is married "to the loveliest American man in the country." They met in France and he brought her back to New York, where he manages a boutique.

Charlotte. "I was born in the United States but left to go to Malta when I was nine. I always wanted to come back. I would tell my parents almost every day that when I turned 18, I would leave to come back to the States. They never took me seriously, but when I was 18, I left Malta with only $100 in my pocket and a suitcase full of clothes. Since then I have put myself halfway through college, found work, and married a really great guy. The only thing I still need to work on is my English. . . . It got stuck at a nine-year-old's level."

Altaf. "Although the exotica-crazy Orientalist might describe India as a country of beggars with bowls, starving multitudes, mystical religions, varying climates, and an even more erratic government, the Bombay that I was born into and resided in until three years ago is a lot like New York City. My decision to come to the U.S.A. for higher education has been the best I ever made."

Josh. A native New Yorker who assures me there's "plenty of 'New Yawk' left in an accent that has been to and seen other places."

Eric. "I am a student (from Jamaica) majoring in journalism because of this primary reason: I enjoy writing almost as much as I enjoy life itself. . . . This is important for me because I do not speak often."

Kweli. "Three years ago I entered what most would call a stressful situation. I was 25, married, and a mother of two children, my biological son and my husband's younger sister. I was working for [the welfare department] and I was enrolled full-time here at Baruch College. Today, I am finishing my last semester and I have to acknowledge to myself that it was hard but I never gave up."

Toward the end of the session, I talk about their first assignment: an article, due next week, on the most influential event in their lives. Heads draw back into necks. Choose, I advise them, an experience your readers can benefit from. Help people who might have endured the same sort of experience—whether it's dealing with your parents' divorce, being abused, committing a crime, being a crime victim—to gain some perspective on what they have gone through.

I am stared at. I am getting used to this. Finally, a hand goes up. Armel, in his crisp South African accent, asks: "What happens if nothing important has happened to you?" Heads nod in agreement. Of course, of course! My students, who have already written snippets about their rich lives, don't see riches.

September 10. We are in the computer lab, a room I dislike because it makes my students clam up. When urged to think on their feet, they often pull on an instinctive mask, perhaps the same one that protects them on the subways, with some of their families, in the offices where they perform cheap labor. The computer terminals encourage this reticence, towering above them, blocking their faces, forcing their spoken words through an obstacle course.

I ask them to write a summary of what they plan to focus on in their first assignment. Ten minutes later I ask for volunteers to read their stuff from their computer screens. No response. I ask again. Still no takers. They're embarrassed and look around the room, hoping to see someone's hand up. I expected this. Self-revelation is too dangerous at Baruch, where promising students suddenly stop appearing in class and several weeks later you

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learn that they had a breakdown or that a sibling got arrested or stabbed or shot.

Finally, Josh, a sad-looking guy, raises one finger. He reads from his screen about how his mother left the family and he ended up living with his taciturn father.

Then he turns away from the screen and toward the class. He has no idea how to write about his relationship with his father. I ask the class to help out.

"Come on, come on," I urge. "How can Josh tell this story?" Someone suggests beginning with a quote. Someone thinks that father and son should be sitting somewhere talking or trying to talk. Hands begin to go up. The class starts to fly. It has taken three meetings and a pending assignment, but something is happening!

I ask someone else to read. After a few seconds a hand is raised. It's Sal. He looks tiny, like a child among giant electronic toys. I notice there is nothing on his computer screen. "I am going to write about the time I got shot in the chest," he announces proudly. The class freezes; you can feel the adrenaline pumping.

"Tell us what it feels like to get shot," a young man says.

"No, begin with the scene around the shooting," a young woman counters firmly. "If you start with the shooting, that's so dramatic that no one will listen to what you say next. Put the shooting in the second graph."

The class ends in a flurry of confusion and conversation.

September 17. They have turned in their first articles. One stands out—Josh's, the one about living with his father. It begins:

> A man in his early 40's with wavy brown hair peppered with gray sat at his dining room table drinking coffee and smoking a cigarette. He wore a white T-shirt, white briefs, and had been writing in a journal. He followed this routine every morning. . . .

The article continues, describing how Josh was caught during a Spanish final exam with verb conjugations written on his palms, how his father told him he'd rather have a son who got C's than one who cheated. I ask Josh to read it aloud. He's the only student who wears ties to class. They are always enormously wide and brilliantly red. He contemplates my request for about ten seconds, then walks to the front of the class. He reads well, with authority. The class is mesmerized.

September 24. By now, my students know something about me, too—that I struggle in my writing, for example. I have told them about harrowing experiences with various magazines, receiving an assignment and sitting for hours at the computer with nothing but increasing panic ahead of me. They don't know, however, that I am their accidental teacher. In fact, before arriving at Baruch, my opinion of CUNY students, based on a couple of newspaper articles, was not a high one. I was a writer and editor; I had never thought much about teaching.

One year, when I was between magazine jobs, a friend in academia offered me an adjunct slot teaching journalism at a private college. I accepted, thinking it might be an interesting diversion. I was surprised how much I enjoyed it, and realized that a permanent position might offer me the satisfaction of being a mentor together with space for my own writing. A flurry of CVs sent to colleges in New York City produced meager results—with the exception of Baruch, which happened to have a tenure-track opening. The influences that usually prompt people to devote their lives to public education—politics, ethics, guilt—played no role in my decision to accept the job. But I have never regretted it.

Judy has written a memory piece about her grandfather reading to her when she was a small child in Hungary. Thick curtains in a parlor allowed "air to sneak between their folds." Her grandfather's blue eyes "would sparkle and dullen [*sic*] with the turning of the pages and the words he was reading." I read aloud a few sentences from her article and ask the students what they think.

"I can almost see him," Lois says dreamily.

"I can imagine that room," says Armel, the South African, whose own article is a fascinating but distant account of celebrating a Bedouin chief's birthday party in the Sinai desert.

I am made happy, of course, by these remarks, as slow as they have been in coming. But about half of the class has said nothing so

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far. One of them, a big lug of a guy named Desmond, has written a wonderful article about being taken to the Poconos for a weekend with a friend's uncle. At a community swimming pool, he and three city friends ran wild, splashing, cannonballing, and swearing. Then they got to yelling mother jokes at each other, of which the most memorable was, "Your mother's so repulsive, she puts ice cubes in her underpants to keep her crabs fresh." Finally, an elderly priest told them to stop cursing.

I ask Desmond to read his article before the class. He lumbers up to the desk, slumps down in my chair, and reads as hurriedly as if the priest were chasing him. We applaud after he finishes. Someone asks him a question about why the kids behaved so rudely. Desmond looks stricken. "This was the first time we had ever been out of Corona," he stammers, and I think he is going to cry. "I didn't even know there were different kinds of people."

October 1. A soft knock on my open office door. Altaf is in the threshold, slightly bent in what I guess is a posture of obsequiousness. I greet him encouragingly. He asks whether he could speak with me "just for a moment; I do not want to bother you." He wonders if I am going to teach "us" anything about writing. At first I am bewildered by his question. I must have looked at him strangely, for he quickly adds, "I mean about putting words together and using the right word." So I guess that he is asking me about writing mechanics. I defer, telling him that in this course students are expected to know something about the sparse use of adjectives, the life that active verbs can bring to a sentence, and the strength of short sentences.

He listens quietly, but more than quietly; there is something serene about Altaf. I notice as I talk that his eyes begin to shine until after a few moments they are luminous. He gently interrupts me. "You know," he says. "I think I am a writer." His words come faster, his mouth works faster. "I know I can use words. I want to be good."

I tell him I think he can be. I tell him to come see me any time he has a question about writing. He bows slightly and backs out of the office door.

October 8. I asked them to write articles about their neighborhoods. I warned them: choose your subject so that if it is set in the Bronx, someone on Staten Island will be interested in reading it. They don't do this. They write descriptive pieces that lack purpose and focus—all except Altaf. His article is about the night he followed his aunt Yashmin's advice to improve his health by sleeping on the floor of his apartment in Queens:

> I spread out a quilt and lay down, grateful that the floor was at least wood—it was easy on the bones. After some tossing and turning, I snuggled into a comfy position. My mind quieted. I became aware of distinct noises: the house settling; crickets chirping outside the window; my clock ticking; thuds from the apartment downstairs; and Ernie—a seven-year-old who lived downstairs—screaming out in agony: "No, Dad! . . . Please stop! . . . Dad!"

The downstairs neighbor, an alcoholic, was beating his son.

November 10. I have just read the students' first articles written on any subject of their choosing. Up to now, I have assigned the subjects. "Don't write 'me, me, me,' articles," I've urged them. "Don't write about inconsequential things." And they have been pretty good about it, beginning to direct their articles to the needs of the reader, beginning to insert a sentence somewhere near the top that tells us why the subject is important.

But now I have let them go to follow their instincts, and they have responded with the panic of a recreational pilot placed in the cockpit of a 747. The plane might get off the ground—but then what? Sal writes a self-serving piece about failing his car inspection. Desmond, a potential star writer, reports meanderingly on a midnight search to satisfy a craving for what he calls "quarter juice," which as a kid he used to shoplift from bodegas. Sametta . . . oh dear, she writes something almost incomprehensible about a nice clerk in a department store in her neighborhood. I can't make heads or tails of it. The more I read, the more I realize that these students still need strict guidance.

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December 8. Eric comes up to me at the end of class. He says he wants to talk about the last in-class writing assignment—about the meaning of writing—but I feel he doesn't really want to talk about that. Here's part of what he wrote for that assignment:

> I could tell the story of the wind and the trees. I could say the wind is kind to the trees for blowing their roots each morning to keep them cool on the grassy plains of the San Fernando Valley. This sounds nice and honest, but does not provide enough context for the reader. Instead, if I were to say: The gusting northeast wind blew beautifully to the roots of the trees that the farmer who died ten years ago had planted on the mountains. The wind and the trees now become neighbors. This would sound much better because I would have provided curiosity about the wind and the farmer. . . .

I gave him a B. He comes to apologize. I compliment him on his idea and brush off the grade, saying that it counts little in the scope of the class. But he is not to be deterred. He tells me that he cannot write under a deadline, that the ideas were there, that he had wanted to bring them forth so they really said something but was unable to.

"It's all right, Eric," I reassure him. "That happens."

"I want you to know that I love to write," he says solemnly. Then, twisting and turning in a kind of ritual dance, he tells me that he is on the edge of failing a remedial algebra course. And if he does fail it, he may not be back here next semester. He's probably correct; Baruch's standards are tightening.

December 10. So what success do the students feel they have experienced this semester? Are they better writers? Worse? And how does that reflect on me? I ask them to sit down at the computers and jot down a short self-progress report. They turn to it with an eagerness quite different from the uncertain acquiescence of the semester's early days.

Here are some reports:

Charlotte. "I was forced to look deep into my past [in the first assignment] and figure out what event had changed my life. I wrote about the time when I moved to Malta with my parents and how painful it was for me to adjust to a new culture. I found myself holding back. . . . I didn't want to admit that I resented my parents for taking me to a strange country. I found myself writing a terrible article and I knew it was not going to improve unless I let go and wrote how I really felt. At the end I felt relieved; I was forced to face feelings that I had suppressed for so many years."

Hélène. "Writing my own story, this has been my main obstacle. I was raised being told that talking about oneself is rude. [I learned that writing] is not about the story in itself, but about how it is laid out."

Desmond. "Crime, poverty and drugs . . . I know about these subjects all too well. I live in a neighborhood where many people are judged by what they do and how they do it. The more severe the crime, the 'badder' the man and the greater the 'rep.' So it was odd that when this topic was assigned, I had an extremely hard time writing about it. I had left that part of my life behind since entering college four years ago. It was difficult for me to drudge [*sic*] up memories of the wrong things I have done to myself and to other people. What led me to finally be able to write on this topic was watching two kids being arrested at the local pool hall one day. I saw how they sat scared in the back seat of an unmarked police car. I saw how ashamed they were when a crowd gathered, pointing fingers and whispering. Watching how the police officers manhandled the two when they didn't obey commands. All this reminded me of the day my friend Vic was arrested. So using that scene, I was able to break out of my writer's block and wrote an article that earned me an A."

Altaf. "Writing is said to be one of the most narcissistic of all activities. It is with the written word that the author pays the biggest compliment to himself when he concludes that his version of the truth is more important than any other version . . . and that his story is the only one worth telling. But the reason I began writing has nothing to do with my sense of self-importance. My urge to write is because of one and only one reason—I can't talk. I can't talk the way Americans would like me to talk. I talk with a strong Indian accent . . . which invariably makes me the butt of innumerable pardon-mes, excuse-mes, whawhazzats, etc."

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Armel. "What the writing experience is all about dawned on me when I was assigned to writing about Madison Square Park. It was there that I came upon a statue transfixed in the earth. A stationary figure with personality, but the inability to express himself. Here is where the writer comes in, acting as voice and witness. I was able to write about this lonely figure, describing it in detail and adding a personal anecdote to the story. The experience was a liberating one for me and, in a sense, for the statue as well. To write is to record a moment in time; I realize that writing truthfully and openly can be a monumental way to leave a personal mark on history."

From these and other comments I gather that most of the students got something good out of this class. Maybe they learned the merit of thinking broadly and writing expressively. I hope they came to realize that writing demands much more of the self than they ever realized, but that it produces a cleansing sort of satisfaction.

I have no idea if this course will stay with them for years, the way some special class you took in the fifth grade lodges permanently in your brain and heart. I suspect they will recall snatches here and there. Maybe they will realize at some point that a sentence they are writing, an experience they are recalling, a face they are describing, does not quite sound right, and won't sound right unless they put more effort into their words.

No one mentioned what may be the most valuable lesson: the value our society places on speaking your mind. In a sense, I have encouraged these students to be more American. By now all the students understand the value of self-expression, not just because it is encouraged but because its exercise tends to result in a higher grade. But while Altaf and Hélène and even Eric know the rewards of speaking up, others in the class probably feel all the more frustrated because they can't blurt out ideas without going through considerable anguish. I hope they gain the self-confidence to break out of their cultural or language barriers.

December 15. I steel myself against the last class, the end of all the work that has gone into a semester, the last time I will see some of my students, the artificial disruption of what could in some cases have turned into real friendships. It is tempting to spend the last class dwelling on all the triumphs and failures of our fourteen weeks together. It is tempting to look into my students' faces—softer today because they, too, know that we will not be meeting again—and think of all they have told me about themselves. But we all know that one of the sad things—and one of the nice things—about courses is that they do end. Pretty soon I will be teaching another group of students, and these students will be listening to other teachers. No one wants to get maudlin.

So I cut my last class short. I ask the students to hand in their last papers and to fill out an anonymous evaluation of the course. I tell them I will be in my office down the hall if they want to talk to me about anything, or just to say good-bye.

Shy Eric comes in and asks for my e-mail address. I wonder why he wants it, wonder if he has something to say to me that he cannot say in person.

Hélène plunks down on a chair next to my desk. She has no direct question, refreshing in itself, so I ask her what courses she is going to take next semester. The conversation comes around to how she came to this country, and she begins telling me about her experiences as an au pair. One family in California treated her like a virtual slave. In another family the mother was dying; it fell to Hélène to explain death to two little children. Story after story pours out about her years of caring for other people's children in a foreign country. I tell her to go write a book about it. She cranes her long neck and light grows in her eyes.

Kweli leans into the doorframe, not wanting to enter my office, not wanting to leave. So she just hangs there and waves and waves.

Altaf walks in. "I have to write," he blurts out. "I know now that I just have to write. What can I do?" He leaves, and in my empty office I feel a terrible sense of loss and exhilaration.

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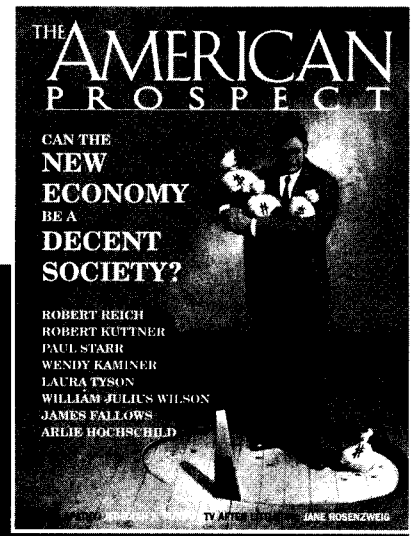

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• BOOKS •

REREADING

Love with a Capital L

VIVIAN GORNICK

When I was in my twenties, my friends and I read Colette as others read the Bible. She was our Book of Wisdom. We read her for solace, and for moral instruction. We read her to learn better who we were, and how, given the constraint of our condition, we were to live. The condition, of course, was that we were women, and that Love (as we had all long known) was the territory upon which our battle with Life was to be pitched. Not another living writer, it seemed to us, understood the situation as well as Colette. No one, in fact, came close. She alone had stared long and hard into the heart of the matter. In her work we could see ourselves not only as we were but as we were likely to become. It was the *potential* for self-recognition that made Colette's novels so compelling.

It was a tricky business, loving Colette as we did, one that spoke to acute inner dividedness. We were intellectually inclined girls, English majors whose relation to literature was high-minded, romantic, amateurish. On the one hand, we read Henry James and George Eliot only to imagine ourselves as Isabel Archer or Dorothea Brooke, passionately intelligent young women destined for pedestrian tragedy at the hands of famously unworthy men. On the other, we were daily absorbed by a hungry fantasy of ourselves as new women, literary and independent; in this spirit we read Mary McCarthy. *The Company She Keeps* gave us back a female protagonist in whom we could see ourselves reflected as we actually were, right then and there (Oh god! we moaned over "The Man in the Brooks Brothers Shirt," that is *just* the way it is). McCarthy's central character was a budding "free" woman whose sexual humiliations were redeemed for us through the delicious brilliance of a prose edged in glittering irony and leveled at those who held the power. What fools her men were, mean and pathetic. Just to see them so portrayed, lowered into a bath of scorn, was to feel ourselves raised up. That, of course, was the thing with McCarthy, the scorn: scorn applied as balm against the surface of the wound.

Yet McCarthy's scorn had, ultimately, the power neither to penetrate nor to clarify. What she knew wasn't sufficient. Didn't go far enough, deep enough, something enough. It only brought us back to Colette—this modern bohemian of two generations back—whose writing achieved so much nuance, so much quick-paced change, such fluidity of thought and feeling that, in her hands, being swamped by sexual attraction had the power of metaphor. Colette's work sounded depths of understanding that were like nothing we had ever encountered. She seemed to know everything that *actually* went on inside a woman "in the grip." Her wisdom riveted your eyes to the page, gathered up your scattered, racing inattention. It made of A Woman in Love as serious a concern for the novelist as God or War. As you read on in Colette, the noise within died down; at the center, stillness and silence began to gather; a point of entry into the human condition was about to be reached.

Vivian Gornick's books include *The End of the Novel of Love* and *Fierce Attachments.*

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Two novels became imprinted on me: *The Vagabond* and *The Shackle.* In these books Colette dramatized the "condition" in a voice more nakedly autobiographical than any she would ever again assume. Here we found a glamorous loneliness, the kind we fantasized as emblematic of the contemporary woman who need no longer absorb in Victorian silence the slings and arrows of outrageous married fortune. She was free now to pick up and go. . . . And then what? Colette would tell us.

For years I had by heart the following passage from *The Vagabond*:

> Behold me then, just as I am! This evening I shall not be able to escape the meeting in the long mirror, the soliloquy which I have a hundred times avoided, accepted, fled from, taken up again and broken off. I feel in advance, alas, the uselessness of trying to change the subject. This evening I shall not feel sleepy, and the spell of a book—even a brand-new book with that smell of printers' ink and paper fresh from the press that makes you think of coal and trains and departures!—even that spell will not be able to distract me from myself.
>
> Behold me then, just as I am! Alone, alone, and for the rest of my life, no doubt.
>
> Alone! Really one might think I was pitying myself for it!
>
> "If you live all alone" [says a friend], "it's because you really want to, isn't it?"
>
> Certainly I "really" want to, and in fact I *want* to, quite simply. Only, well . . . there are days when solitude, for someone of my age, is a heady wine which intoxicates you with freedom, others when it is a poison which makes you beat your head against the wall.

How we resonated at twenty-three to this situation—and to think, it was being lived at a time when a new book in one's hands could remind the reader of coal, trains, and departure! Renée Néré, the astonishingly forthright narrator of *The Vagabond* and *The Shackle,* is a woman in her thirties whose fractured identity is central to her existence. She has written books, she has divorced her husband, she has gone on the stage. And now, here she was suffering the consequences of her actions.

Yet Renée's hold on her newfound independence is transparently shaky (even we could see that). Take, for instance, the curious business of her writing. Although she has published two books, writing is a fugitive longing in Renée. Why? The impulse, quite simply, is not strong enough:

> From time to time I feel a need, sharp as thirst in summer, to note and to describe. . . . The attack does not last long; it is but the itching of an old scar. . . . It takes up too much time to write. And the trouble is, I am no Balzac! The fragile story I am constructing crumbles away when the tradesman rings, or the shoemaker sends in his bill, when the solicitor, or one's counsel, telephones, or when the theatrical agent summons me to his office.

Hardly the words of one compelled by her talent to make art (again, a situation we understood *perfectly*). The desire in a woman to be "free" is (we well knew) easily undermined by desire itself. Struggle as she may, a woman is always torn between the longing for independence and the need for love. It is this, really—the Question of Love—that we soon see commands Renée's real attention. Love has come, and love has gone. Should it come again, she muses repeatedly, will she give in to the siren song or will she resist with all her might? She knows everything there is to know about the emotional slavery that accompanies desire—the longings, the anxieties, the humiliations. Still, the lure is powerful.

The argument with herself about whether or not to resist love is the remarkably sustained subject of the two novels that Renée Néré narrates. In *The Vagabond* she will renounce it, in *The Shackle* she will knuckle under to it. The first gratified us, the second shocked us. Either way, we were in thrall. What carried the day was the significance, in Colette's hands, of erotic obsession. Love with a capital L, in both books, is the glory and the despair, equally, of a woman's life. "What torments you've thrust me into all over again," Renée cries to the friend who introduces her to the first lover. "Torments," she adds reverently, "that I wouldn't exchange for all the greatest joys." Love is the divine stig-

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mata, the extraordinary mark of a knowing life, upon which Colette's unique powers of observation were here trained.

Recently, I read these books again for the first time in more than thirty years, and the experience was unsettling. The wholly unexpected occurred: I came away from them with mixed feelings. This time around I found myself thinking, Ah yes! how brilliantly it is all evoked—the endless fantasizing, the pathologic insecurity, the emptiness inside the protagonist that opens wide to take in Love with a capital L. Really, the writing is incomparable. But what appalling *strangers* these people are to one another! Not a speck of reality between them. How preoccupied she is with aging. Why hadn't I noticed *that* before? And the aimlessness of them all, women and men alike—especially in *The Shackle.* No one has anything to do but lie around brooding about love.

Most striking, for me—the single greatest change, in fact, in my feeling about these novels—was the sense I had that everything was taking place in a vacuum. When I had read Colette before, the world seemed to collect around the narrator's wisdom. Now I saw that Renée's reflections led back—only and always—into the secret, silent self. She was alone in the world; alone and lonely.

Early on in *The Vagabond* she observes Max, her future lover, and she is thinking:

> How is it that he, who is in love with me, is not in the least disturbed that he knows me so little? He clearly never gives that a thought . . . [never] does he show any eagerness to find out what I am like, to question me or read my character, and I notice that he pays more attention to the play of light on my hair than to what I am saying. . . . How strange all that is! There he sits close to me . . . [but he] is not there, he is a thousand leagues away! I keep wanting to get up and say to him: "Why are you here? Go away!" And I do nothing of the kind. . . . Does he think? Does he read? Does he work? I believe he belongs to that large rather commonplace class of persons who are interested in everything and do absolutely nothing. Not a trace of wit, a certain quickness of comprehension, a very adequate vocabulary enhanced by a beautiful rich voice, that readiness to laugh with a childish gaiety that one sees in many men—such is my admirer.

The absence of connection between them is penetrating—and unabating. Four years later, in *The Shackle,* Renée, now retired from the stage and openly at loose ends, falls into an affair with Jean, a man she could describe much as she did Max, and one with whom the association is even more nakedly chemical—and isolating:

> Our honest bodies have clung together with a mutual thrill of delight they will remember the next time they touch, while our souls will withdraw again behind the barrier of the same dishonest but expedient silence. . . . We had learnt already that . . . [e]mbracing gives us the illusion of being united and silence makes us believe we are at peace. . . . I have insulted this lover . . . by giving him my body and supposing that this was enough. He has returned the insult . . . for nothing is exchanged in the sexual act. . . . [O]ur love which had begun in silence and the sexual act was ending in the sexual act and silence.

This is the anxiety of infatuation speaking—Colette at her absolute best—the anxiety of knowing that one is not known, that one is (marvelously, terribly) only a catalyst for another's desire. This anxiety is the thing Colette knows through and through: the wisdom at the heart of her fame; there, from the beginning, like a smoking gun; the source, inevitably, of her narrator's obsessive preoccupation with aging.

In the earliest pages of *The Vagabond* Renée stares pitilessly into the mirror. She is thirty-three years old, and the dreaded decline is eating at her. If it weren't for that, she might stay with Max after all, even though she can't talk to him. But at the end, when he proposes marriage, promising lifelong happiness and security, she breaks off the affair with a letter of explanation that says it all:

> I am no longer a young woman. . . . Imagine me [in a few years' time], still beautiful but desperate, frantic in my armour of corset and frock, under my make-up and powder . . . beautiful as a full-blown rose which one must not touch. A glance of yours, resting on a

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> young woman, will be enough to lengthen the sad crease that smiling has engraved on my cheek, but a happy night in your arms will cost my fading beauty dearer still. . . . What this letter lacks is . . . all the thoughts I am hiding from you, the thoughts that have been poisoning me for so long. . . . Ah! How young you are. Your hell is limited to not possessing what you desire, a thing which some people have to put up with all their lives. But to possess what one loves and every minute to feel one's sole treasure disintegrating, melting, and slipping away like gold dust between one's fingers! And not to have the dreadful courage to open one's hand and let the whole treasure go, but to clench one's fingers ever tighter, and to cry and beg to keep . . . what? a precious little trace of gold in the hollow of one's palm.

Who but Colette could have etched this portrait (acid on zinc) of a woman staring into the hell that seems reserved for women alone? And who but Colette could have failed so entirely to unpack it?

When I read Colette in my twenties, I said to myself, That is exactly the way it is. Now, I read her and I find myself thinking, How much smaller this all seems than it once did—cold, brilliant, limited—and silently I am saying to her, Why aren't you making more sense of things? Yes, I have from you the incomparable feel of an intelligent woman in the grip of romantic obsession, and that is strong stuff. But sexual passion as a driving force doesn't seem to matter on its own, as it once did. It no longer feels large. Certainly, it no longer feels metaphoric.

Why? I ask myself. Is it that I no longer "identify" with the delicious despair of erotic love? Hardly. I have learned over a long enough life that at any moment anyone who is alive can feel it all—the joy, the panic, the sick excitement—exactly as she did at twenty-five or thirty-five. No, it is a matter not of feeling, but of altered sensibility: not only mine but that of the culture as well. The question to ask is, Does a person who is twenty-five today read Colette as *I* read her at twenty-five? And the answer to that, I'm afraid, is also: Hardly. It's not that *I* have passed from youth to middle age, it's that the culture has undergone a sea change. Even though we *feel* love as we always did, we don't *make* of it what we once did.

When *The Vagabond* was published in 1910, André Gide sent Colette a letter of extravagant admiration: he thought the novel brilliant and powerful. For the next forty years, Colette's work would be received in the same spirit by every leading literary light throughout Europe and America. She was beloved not only for her mastery of the French language—her famous style—but also because she said things that struck a nerve deep in the culture. Her books persuaded her readers that something fundamental and immutable was being described: naked, unadorned, and irreducibly true. It is impossible to imagine the same response being accorded this work today—not because it is about love (Tolstoy, Flaubert, and Stendhal are also about love), but because it is *only* about love.

So where does that leave me? Filled with righteous feminist rejection of Colette? Not so easy as that. I walk around these days feeling as though pieces of her writing lie heavy on my chest. Sometimes a sentence lifts itself off the surface, and stands in the air before me. . . . "Our honest bodies [cling] together with a mutual thrill of delight while our souls withdraw behind the barrier." Repeatedly, I lean in toward the prose. Then, of course, that which has changed in me shrinks, holds back, stiffens. I *want* the reading of Colette to be the same as it once was, but it is not. Yet I am wrenched by the beauty of that which no longer feels large, and can never feel large again.

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Elements of an English Upbringing

JENNY DISKI

THE KNOX BROTHERS
By Penelope Fitzgerald. Counterpoint Press. $26.

In the decade after the war, and long before Harry Potter, I learned what an English family was supposed to be from the books I found in the public children's library. There were the Darlings of Barrie's *Peter Pan;* the Christopher Robins and James James Morrison Morrison Weatherby George Duprees of A. A. Milne; Edmund, Lucy, Peter, and Susan from C. S. Lewis's Narnia stories; Great Uncle Gum's Fossils in Noel Streatfield's *Ballet Shoes;* and the Bastables of E. Nesbit's *Treasure Seekers.* None of these children came from a background anything like my own, but they were, I had no doubt, the real thing, and I and mine a deviation from the norm of proper middle-class English life.

The families of the children from the books were not rich or aristocratic. Some indeed were suffering genteel poverty—a falling away from a style of life they had once been accustomed to—because of the changing times (wartime shortages, postwar austerity, the loss of parents through war or carelessness). But they all possessed similar standards of speech, behavior, and education that I learned to think of as distinguishing elements of an English upbringing. I could taste and smell the rambling, underheated, over-corridored houses the siblings (there were almost always multiple siblings) ranged around and hear their effortless elocution as they called to one another, although I lived in a centrally heated, two-room city-center flat with just my mother and father, both children of heavily accented immigrants. I knew exactly how it should be, but I also knew how alien I was from it—as alien in my actual life in England from real English life as I was from the world of the fairy and folk tales that were the other source of my reading.

This was part of the reality of growing up in a class-bound society where the slightest shade of rank could be discerned from a single syllable or the quality of a walk. The problem was not that I wasn't middle-class, but that my Englishness was uncertain, since even second-generation Jewish immigrants were then out of the loop. However, I knew from reading, and from the very air I breathed, it seemed, precisely how the system worked. And, of course, I fervently wished I belonged, not just because belonging is what children wish to do, but because after all the hardships or heartache the characters had to suffer, they counted enough to inhabit storybooks. It wasn't just that they had substance, but that they were the substance of the country I inhabited and the imaginary life I led, as mythic to me as the fairy-tale princes and princesses, but real, too. I believed in them most of all because they seemed to believe so utterly in themselves.

This conflation of fairy tale and a perfect English family appears in the introduction to Penelope Fitzgerald's memoir of her Edwardian father and his three brothers, as she recalls how each Knox brother counseled her on her wedding day. She doesn't begin "Once upon a time," or entitle it "The Four Wishes," but: "Evoe, my father, muttered to me on the way to my wedding, 'The only thing I want is for everyone, as far as possible, to be happy.' Dillwyn: 'Nothing is impossible.' Wilfred: 'Get on with it'—also 'Why

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should we not go on, through all eternity, growing in love and in our power to love?' Ronnie: 'Do the most difficult thing.'"

Imagine coming into the world and having ready-made, not on paper, but in the flesh, these four benevolent, brilliant, quirky spirits watching over you. You would, of course, want to notate and celebrate such a family, to make a storybook of their lives and utterances. And reading that book, I experience in myself an immediate return to my childhood voyeurism and a confusion of envy and derision at the familiar echoes that retain such power, even now that I know there is a price the proper English family has to pay.

Evoe—Edmund—became the editor of *Punch* and a famous wit. Dillwyn was a distinguished classicist and later the director of the project at Station X in Bletchley Park that broke Germany's Enigma code during World War II. Wilfred settled into being an Anglo-Catholic priest, living a quietly saintly existence devoted to poverty and telling only a single lie in his whole life. Ronald, a Catholic convert, was chaplain of Oxford and a translator of the New Testament, as well as a writer of detective fiction and popular newspaper columns.

The Knox boys (there were two sisters: Winnie, who gives sweetness and succor to the brothers, but who doesn't count in Fitzgerald's mind as extraordinary like the boys, and Ethel, who is somewhat backward and simply doesn't count) were the sons of an Anglican bishop, himself a descendant of a long line of clergymen going back to the eighteenth century. On their mother's side, there were vicars and a grandfather, Thomas French, Bishop of Lahore, who was more of a wandering fakir and seems to have been revered as a saint by Christians and Hindus alike. Fitzgerald's story of her uncles' lives begins when England was still a place of empire and certainty. The story continues, however, through two world wars and the social turmoil they brought, when even the children of the establishment had to find their relation to modernity. Penelope Fitzgerald, a fine novelist, wrote the book in 1977, whereupon it was published and went quickly out of print. She completed this new edition just before she died earlier this year at the age of eighty-four, and it is clear from the moments when her own voice calls through the quiet, admiring, pellucid narrative that she has her own uneasy relation to the contemporary world. The sense of a lost way of life is palpable on every page.

The family story follows an inevitable trajectory: the transformation of the boys' nursery brilliance into academic high flying, their acquisition of essential English eccentricities, and their attainment of final eminence in their chosen fields. Punctuating this mellifluous progress are a series of difficulties in the form of personal tragedies (the early death of their mother, the deaths of wives and beloved friends) and excruciating moral and religious choices that shake but fail to rupture the family affections. The brothers' childhood, in large, drafty rectories, was exemplary. They learned and recited the whole of *Bradshaw's Railway Guide* along with Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome*. They forbade each other to speak any languages they didn't all understand, though Ronnie threatened to learn Sanskrit and Welsh. Dilly was an erratic but brilliant cricketer, and so was not permitted to make more than one hundred and fifty runs a game. They invented rules of life and play so recondite no outsider could hope to break in, and the family game-playing developed naturally into the poetry, cryptography, translating, and theologizing they were to occupy themselves with for the rest of their lives. In the thirties, when spending eighteen hours a day deciphering German code was not enough to keep him busy, Dilly contrived a new five-line verse form he called a Pentelope. Each line had to end with a word of the same form, but with a different vowel, and the vowels had to come in their proper order, a, e, i, o, u, or the equivalent sounds in English:

> Just look at my father
> And mother together!
> I fancy that neither
> Would very much bother
> If rid of the other.

He was accused of creating a form that was too rule-bound to handle genuine emotion, so on A. E. Housman's death he produced a

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Pentelope obituary with echoes of "They told me, Heraclitus, they told me you were dead. . . ."

> Sad though the news, how sad
> Of thee, the poet, dead!
> But still thy poems abide—
> There Death, the unsparing god
> Himself dare not intrude.

The affection of the Knox family members for each other developed into degrees of socialism in all the brothers, which meant that even the most religious of them expected goodness to have some positive effect on the ills of the world. Their brilliance, of course, went without saying. Of the four, only Evoe failed to get his Oxbridge first (although as the editor of *Punch* he was awarded an honorary D. Litt.), while Ronald, the youngest, was a golden child, regarded as the most brilliant of his generation at Eton. At the age of four Ronnie was asked what he liked doing and replied, "I think all day, and at night I think about the past." Doubtless in Latin. Dilly, the second oldest, was the only one who went to Cambridge, where as a classicist of note at King's College, admired by Lytton Strachey and best friend of Maynard Keynes, he became the only confirmed atheist in the family.

Not wanting to expose the immortal souls of the two youngest to the air of the godless Fens, the bishop insisted that Wilfred and Ronald go to Oxford, where religion did indeed grip them, but caused more heartache (the Anglo-Catholicism of Wilfred, the eventual "poping" of Ronnie) for the bishop than Dillwyn's defection, which is glossed by Fitzgerald as "nothing less than faith by an appeal to reason." According to his niece, Dilly became convinced that Christianity was a two-thousand-year-old swindle eliciting false fears and hopes in believers. "If the swindle could be proved, that would 'save his reason,' and Dilly always hoped that it might be. Yet his attitude was always to defy God for what He had done, or reprove Him for not existing, rather than ignore Him because He didn't."

This is the author being her usual tartly witty self, but also excusing her atheistic uncle by not quite believing in his disbelief. Penelope Fitzgerald is not just a narrator of the lives of her father and uncles, but a commentator whose passing thoughts about her subject and the state of the world place her firmly in the Knox tradition. She never, apart from her wedding wishes, refers directly to herself, but right and wrong are manifestly as clear to her as they were to her uncles. Speaking of the "plain but good" upbringing of Christina Hicks, Evoe's wife and her mother, she tells how as children Christina and her sister would write down a list of all the things they wanted but couldn't afford, then they would burn the piece of paper. "This is a device which is always worth trying," Fitzgerald advises her reader. She takes a firmly humane view of the doctrinal anguish that Ronnie's tendency to Catholicism caused his father: "Surely one would think it must have been as clear then as it is now that if human love could rise above the doctrines that divide the Church, then these doctrines must have singularly little to do with the love of God." But she keeps sentimentality where it belongs. On the subject of the perfect hard sauce or brandy butter, which the brothers craved at Christmas but which only Merton College made correctly (and then lost the knack of producing), she is severe: "Perhaps perfection should be left where it belongs, in childhood."

What results is a departure from the modern notion of biography, where emotional distance and popular psychology are supposed to provide bold insights into the shadowy motivations of those lost to the past. Instead there is frank affiliation with standards and ethics that wed her characters to their time, an acknowledgment that things have changed but no glee in filleting period from personality, and an understanding of the power of the past on a life without the dulling determinacy of the full Freudian project. It is, in a word, an old-fashioned account of time and place and people into which the time and place and character of Penelope Fitzgerald, the next generation, is cunningly and pointedly woven. It reveals in its quiet manner Fitzgerald's particular ability to portray a rather quirky but touching world, as she did in her novels. And it shows that such a world was, after all, hers in every way.

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Two Lives

MY LOVE AFFAIR WITH AMERICA: THE CAUTIONARY TALE OF A CHEERFUL CONSERVATIVE
By Norman Podhoretz. Free Press. $25.

BLOOD OF THE LIBERALS
By George Packer. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $26.

Reviewed by KEITH GESSEN

In the late 1940s, in one of those neat historical ironies once as common to New York City as Yiddish shop signs, Norman Podhoretz attended Columbia College alongside Allen Ginsberg. They both sat at the feet of Lionel Trilling, and Ginsberg even published two Podhoretz poems in the *Columbia Review.* Then they parted ways: Ginsberg went searching for the starry dynamo in the machinery of night, and Podhoretz began writing for *Commentary.* It seemed at the time like the obvious road to literary stardom: for about twenty years after the war, "the Jewish *Harper's*" managed, like the Jewish Harvard at Brandeis, to outdo its patrician counterpart. Podhoretz became the magazine's editor in 1960, when he was just thirty, and immediately announced solidarity with the nascent radicalism of the Left. By the late sixties, though, he was steering *Commentary* back sharply to the Right, and in the meantime had published the first of his memoirs, *Making It,* a book that purported to tell all and sundry about the New York Intellectuals and that met with near-universal condemnation. "If I were God," another Columbia classmate, Jason Epstein, is said to have remarked of that boastful tome, "I would drown it in the river."

Podhoretz has been coolly racking up enemies ever since, with famous success. "I actually cannot speak the man's name," a Philip Roth character once claimed, "without tasting my gall in my mouth." Yet Podhoretz is not without his charms. At a time when books are discussed as if they had emerged from a vacuum, related, if to anything, only to other books, he produces reviews that read more like political scorecards; and his ability to narrate the political, always imagining himself and his friends as a merry band of "heretical" intellectuals, is refreshing. *My Love Affair with America* may contain less ad hominem venom than his previous three memoirs, but it is still dramatically polemical, opening with the image of an aged Podhoretz reluctantly, Achilles-like, "buckling on my slightly rusted armor for yet another campaign."

What follows is an oblique attack on the Republican Party's paranoid anti-government wing, oblique because Podhoretz, in order to shame the Right by association, devotes most of the book to rehashing his beef with the Left. Though promising to "glorify" America "with a full throat and a whole heart," the narrative rarely escapes the corridor whispering of sectarian squabbles. The real target throughout is not so much the Left's political philosophy as its willed alienation from American life—Podhoretz loathed writers, like Ginsberg and Irving Howe, who lambasted the conformism of fifties intellectual life, because for him it was a "delight to see the writers and intellectuals I most admired . . . endorsing the patriotism that had been bred into my bones from childhood and that came so much more naturally to me than . . . 'alienation.'" Podhoretz, it turns out, was alienated from the alienated intellectuals themselves and was on the side, all the while, of the American people.

The book is pledged, then, to this staid acceptance of things American. Podhoretz has never been one to recollect his old battles in anything like tranquillity, but by now he's recounted his disagreements with Howe, Philip Rahv, and Lionel Trilling so many times that a tranquillity of sorts has settled on them regardless. "It was because I could not stomach the terrible and untrue things [my New York friends] were saying about this country," he declares, "that I wound up breaking with them." This is no way to be friends, of course, and the phrase "when we were still on speaking terms" makes its weary appearance alongside the familiar snipes at the dead. Still, as

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Podhoretz extends his "love affair" metaphor in ever more directions to explore fully his affection for these United States, the overwhelming impression is one of satisfaction—with the country, the culture, and the self.

George Packer's beautiful memoir-history reads, to the contrary, like a genealogy of defeat. Charting three generations of liberal belief, Packer finds his protagonists entering history, as if according to some demonic schedule, at those precise moments when it becomes a guillotine. His maternal grandfather, a longtime Democratic congressman from Alabama, spoke up for African-American suffrage in 1912, opposed Woodrow Wilson's leap into World War I in 1917, and took on FDR in 1935; Packer's father was on the losing side of both the McCarthy fifties and the radical sixties; and Packer himself, a novelist and journalist, managed to join the Democratic Socialists of America in the inauspicious year of 1989—only to cease being active when he felt that his own marriage to defeat had become too comfortable. Far from Podhoretz's newfound quiescence, there is a sense, at every point in this arching, century-long narrative, that something has gone wrong.

Nothing went quite so terribly wrong as the 1960s, and the central story in *Blood of the Liberals* concerns Packer's father, a Stanford law professor and administrator who, after getting Red-baited in the fifties, found himself, in 1967, on the crumbling barricade between a rigid university and a rabid student movement. A strict proceduralist, he was not the man for the job, and Packer makes this abundantly clear. At the same time, the pages seethe with a barely contained animus toward the students. Packer abhors their rhetoric, their recklessness, their dilettantism. The decade, he writes, "was more than anything else a mood. It left behind no viable worldview." The conservative backlash that followed he lays decisively at the students' feet: "I grew up a liberal loser in a conservative age because they decided to have a revolution." Like Podhoretz, Packer takes politics seriously, and watching documentary film of an SDS meeting, he bridles at the students' psychologized version of commitment: "Fathers and sons, clamped emotions, the need to break free—did the revolution come down to this?"

Because the revolution ought to have been so much more—it ought, for one thing, to have been about justice. But this memoir's distinction resides in its sense that the spirit's less world-historical movements must not be ignored. Packer has a remarkably tough mind, and the family history is subjected always to the rigors of his hard, gem-like observations. Of a book of youthful poems his grandfather published at the age of eighty-two, he writes: "In the way of most rigid and repressed men, he carried on a sort of shadow emotional life that mainly found expression in sentimentality." The sort of sentimentality that so often corrodes family histories is purged from Packer's writing, but the partisanship left standing is nevertheless tempered and tortured by the constant pressure of familial bonds.

So perhaps it is not as surprising as it initially seems that the left-liberal Packer, who shares so much of the radicals' politics, is so harsh in his treatment of the radicals themselves. In 1969, worn out by the pressures of facing down a movement by then deteriorating into senseless violence, Herbert Packer suffered a stroke. Three years later, he checked into a San Francisco hotel and killed himself. Packer may well sympathize with the students' demands, but *Blood of the Liberals* makes no concessions to the merely political. Writing of his father's too-strict faith in rationalism, Packer quotes Thomas Mann: "It is love, not reason, that is stronger than death."

This is a deeply affecting, relentlessly honest book, delivered in the stylistic equivalent of perfect pitch. What is more, it is the sort of book that one would someday like to write, and for all that writing is absence and language a construct, it is impossible to read these two memoirs without considering the selves that produced them. They emerged, these selves, from very similar places in the culture. Both are in some measure products of the postwar, New York Jewish intellectual explosion, which helps explain why they treat political ideas with such furrowed-brow seriousness and why their memoirs read more like intellectual histories than emotional or familial confessions. Packer's father appeared in Podhoretz's *Commentary,* while Packer himself writes for *Dissent,* which is, like *Commentary,* an

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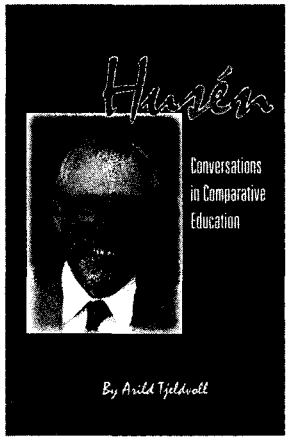
offspring of the *Partisan Review*. Last year, Packer published a cutting essay there on Podhoretz's previous memoir, *Ex-Friends*. It has remained, as they say, in the family. And yet it would be difficult to imagine a pair of books that are stylistically and morally so far apart. Somewhere along the line, these selves diverged in a radical, irrevocable way.

But where? In attempting to account for the liberalism of his congressman grandfather, Packer offers this: "My grandfather, growing up in the defeated, rural South, discovered at an early age that even American stories don't always have happy endings, family pride is mingled with shame, and life can grind people down until they lose the will to strive." These are beautiful lines, but Packer admits that they cannot fully explain a lifetime's political conviction. "Psychologically," he concedes, "two reactions are possible."

Two reactions are possible—and this is all the room one needs to build a moral vision of the world. Both writers inherited the myth of the alienated intellectual, and a strain of defeat, bordering on self-pity, appears in both these books: in Podhoretz's because the "conservative mind" has been so long harassed by arrogant liberals, in Packer's because the liberal dream has suffered one deathblow too many. But they cannot both be right, and there is, anyway, a crucial difference: Podhoretz decided early on that alienation was a myth, and he spent only as much time on the losing side as was necessary.

"We're gonna get you through your children!" an exasperated Ginsberg once promised his life-long nemesis, and though the attempt at generational culture war seems to have backfired, in the end Podhoretz was obliged to gobble up his friends. For too much is ceded, in Podhoretz's thinking, to political allegiance, and his memoirs have finally been as low as Packer's memoir is noble, because he has never acknowledged that kinship, too, makes its demands. "The relationship between politics and home is impossible to pin down," writes Packer, "and impossible to ignore." The truly bloody crossroads has always been where politics intersects not with literature but with family, and it is Packer's book that plants itself there with all the humanity and ambivalence such a difficult outpost requires.



Torsten Husén

Conversations in Comparative Education

by Arild Tjeldvoll, edited by Hans G. Lingens

A lively, authoritative biography of this pioneer in comparative education, drawn from interviews and conversations. Illustrated with photographs from Husén's life.

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The Endurance of Art

RUSKIN'S VENICE:
THE STONES REVISITED
By Sarah Quill. Ashgate Publishing.
$49.95.

Reviewed by JAMES TRILLING

Ruskin's Venice is a book in search of a category. Is it a collection of photographs of Venetian architecture (Quill is a photographer) with passages from John Ruskin as a convenient peg? A photographic supplement to *The Stones of Venice,* providing the visual documentation that by Ruskin's own admission it badly needed? A commentary on Ruskin's way of seeing, juxtaposing his drawings with the "real" shapes and colors of Venetian architecture as captured on film? A historical epilogue to Ruskin's work, telling how the monuments, and by extension the city itself, have fared in the 150 years since he wrote about them? A guidebook for Ruskin devotees? An introduction to Ruskin, juxtaposing excerpts from his work with the buildings that inspired him?

The answer is almost all of these things, and none of them. The book lacks the archaeological detail to serve as a record of historic preservation (or its failure), and the sequence of buildings diverges too widely from Ruskin's text to make a useful supplement. The scale of the images—most are postcard size or smaller—is appropriate to a guidebook, and *Ruskin's Venice* does suggest an unconventional and exciting way to explore the city (the map on pages 196–197 is especially useful). Few people, however, will buy a fifty-dollar hardback for this purpose, and fewer will actually carry it. Ashgate would do the public and the photographer a service by marketing an inexpensive paperback edition in Italy.

Despite the problem of scale, *Ruskin's Venice* succeeds best as a collection of photographs. The images have an assured and elegant humility. There are no "arty" camera angles, no self-consciously dramatic contrasts of light and shade, no overly sharp details to proclaim: I, the photographer, have *seen.* The buildings simply exist. It should go without saying that this apparent refusal of a personal vision is itself a vision, and a beautifully effective one. Most of the photographs suggest the very early morning, when the light has just become clear but is not yet intense. It is a daring tactic, given Ruskin's insistence on the centrality of color in Venetian aesthetics, but it succeeds. Instead of blasting us with color, Quill gives us color as an attribute of real, weathered stone. The cumulative effect is poignant: through understatement alone, without the contrived melancholy of lengthening shadows and purple sunsets, she has caught the pastness of Venice, the gulf of history separating the city whose streets we can still walk from the days of its living glory. The same sense of grandeur preserved in decline, at once timeless and battered by time, pervades *The Stones of Venice.* One need not know or admire Ruskin to see Venice in this way, but I have no doubt that the correspondence is intentional. Quill's photographs complement the text.

But what, exactly, is the text? Ruskin was the most influential art critic of nineteenth-century England, but time has dulled his appeal. Despite the artistic affinity, *Ruskin's Venice* is not an introduction to Ruskin's thought, nor does it provide what we need most, an accessible version of his long, digressive, brilliantly moving work. Quill's edited text cannot be considered an abridgment, even a drastic one, since she has made no attempt to keep the form of the original. It is a series of excerpts, ranging in length from a few lines to a few paragraphs, chosen because they discuss specific buildings or architectural details. Not only are we left in the dark regarding the larger context of Ruskin's observations, but the selections are not even in their original sequence. Some are not even from *The Stones of Venice,* but from his other works. Every excerpt is labeled, but there is no getting around the fact that such decontextualization reduces even the longer passages to captions.

James Trilling, an art historian, is the author of *Ornament: A Modern Perspective,* forthcoming from the University of Washington Press. His memoir "My Father and the Weak-Eyed Devils" appeared in the Spring 1999 SCHOLAR.

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This willingness to play fast and loose with Ruskin's text is symptomatic of his uncertain place in our intellectual world. No other writer of English prose conveys so powerfully the nature of visual experience. Like a lyric poet, Ruskin can lead us not just to reflect on what he has seen, but to re-experience it in our own minds. This very power threatens his status as a thinker. His books invite reading as collections of prose poems rather than as analysis and polemic. It is no surprise that Quill perpetuates this error: even in Ruskin's lifetime the beauty of his prose was as often a hindrance as an aid to the reception of his ideas.

Why, 150 years later, should Ruskin's architectural history of one Italian city excite more than passing or antiquarian interest? The answer is that the conclusions he drew from visual experience are on a par with his power to communicate that experience. His insights reach further, into more aspects of the human condition, than those of any other art critic. For Ruskin, the aesthetic and moral health of a society were inseparable. His goal in showing readers how to apprehend a culture through its art was to teach them to distinguish a healthy from an unhealthy society. To make sure the lesson sank in, he made *The Stones of Venice* a complete course in the appreciation of architecture, from the fundamentals of structure to the details of ornament. This is why the book is so long, and why no abridgment that concentrates on individual buildings can do justice to Ruskin's plan.

Again and again, Ruskin challenges his readers to look, to think, to choose for themselves: "Very few faults of architecture are mistakes of honest choice: they are almost always hypocrisies." What he means by hypocrisy is unthinking acceptance of convention. It is what happens when an architect designs something in a certain way, not because he thinks it is useful or beautiful, but because it is what the public expects. The public, meanwhile, have not stopped to consider what they actually like, but demand a particular way of doing things because they have been told it is the proper way. Ruskin's special target was the formulaic use of classical elements in his own milieu ("Do you seriously imagine, reader, that any living soul in London likes triglyphs?"), but he speaks just as eloquently to a world he never lived to see, in which ornament has long been anathema whether the public have wanted

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it or not, and the gap between elite and popular taste has never been wider.

Although Ruskin tells his readers to make their own choices, he has a very clear notion of what those choices should be, and the lessons are carefully slanted to give his often idiosyncratic precepts the force of common sense. This disingenuousness is Ruskin's worst fault as a critic, but it should not deter us; much of what he wants us to like is worth liking. Above all, he sought to instill a love of spontaneity and a corresponding detestation of order and system when practiced for their own sake. Hence his delight in medieval styles; hence his contempt for what he perceived as the rigidity of Greco-Roman architecture and the literal-mindedness of classical architecture since the Renaissance. This polarity, which he presents in almost apocalyptic terms, is itself a metaphor for the far more desperate struggle between the pre-industrial and industrial ways of life. 1851, when *The Stones of Venice* was published, was also the year of the Great Exhibition: a celebration of British industry, housed in the first great prefabricated building, the Crystal Palace. Against this background, Ruskin's paean to the spontaneity of Gothic architecture—what he romantically but unforgettably calls its "wolfish life"—becomes a plea and a lament for the threatened autonomy of workers everywhere.

We have inherited what Ruskin feared: a world in which mass production has eclipsed the work of individual hands. We still have art, but few of us would suggest that its goal is beauty. Instead of refining and reinforcing social values, artists seek validation by subverting them. These disharmonies have their roots in Ruskin's time; despite the tendentiousness of his arguments and the distracting music of his prose, he addresses them powerfully. The heart of Ruskin's teaching is that good and bad are never casual artistic judgments. Decadence is not a raffish entertainment but a potentially fatal illness of art and society.

Looking at architectural ornament, Ruskin senses decadence in self-indulgence and excess: in "that character of extravagance . . . which shows that it was addressed to jaded faculties; a violence and coarseness in curvature, a depth of shadow, a lusciousness in arrangement of line, evidently arising out of an incapability of feeling the true beauty of chaste form and restrained power." This pronouncement embodies everything the last hundred years have taught us to mistrust, and seems to contradict Ruskin's own delight in imaginative freedom and power. Extravagance as a sign of jaded taste—may we not give our imaginations free rein? Chaste form and restrained power—are we never free to pull out all the stops? Must we always be alert for violations of an abstract code? Have we not learned to avoid the whole contested territory by renouncing ornament? Finally and crucially, can the imposition of a universal moral framework lead anywhere but to conformity?

Yet the same strictures satisfy a need that is every bit as strong as the hunger for artistic freedom: our need for rules and limits. There is something irresistibly flattering in being held to a lofty standard, however arrogant and arbitrary that standard may seem. It makes us want to prove, if only to ourselves, that we are worthy of such trust. The formal vocabulary of art has changed almost beyond recognition since Ruskin's day, but his invitation to set ourselves above "extravagance" and "lusciousness" (read self-indulgence of any kind), and to find intensity even in restraint, speaks to aspirations that the ideologically strident but formally impoverished art of our time ignores. As for conformity, Ruskin hated it as much as we do; *he* taught *us* to hate it. But just as he recognized a time and place for unrestrained power, he knew that nothing devalued sublimity so surely as the relentless, mechanistic pursuit of overwhelming effects.

Our most treasured legacy from modernism is an amplification of the Romantic myth of the artist, heroic battler against convention. Postmodernism has taught us to handle convention lightly, as a useful joke. Ironically, one architectural movement advocates the synthesis of structure and ornament, and the "true beauty of chaste form," in terms that Ruskin would have recognized. This is classicism, the historically faithful, civically sincere classicism whose narrowness Ruskin deplored, reincarnated as a means of focusing the postmodern flirtation with convention against the centrifugal tendencies of modernism. In difficult times, artistic politics makes strange bedfellows.

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The Mating Game

PROMISCUITY: AN EVOLUTIONARY HISTORY OF SPERM COMPETITION AND SEXUAL CONFLICT
By T. R. Birkhead. Harvard. $24.95.

Reviewed by SUSAN ALLPORT

Consider for a moment, as T. R. Birkhead asks us to do, the seminal fluid of the common housefly. It carries sperm, of course. But it is also the vehicle for a number of very potent chemicals. Some of them mimic substances in the female's body that trigger egg laying; others, like chemical chastity belts, are anti-aphrodisiacs and discourage the female from any future sexual encounters.

This co-option of sperm as a weapon in the ongoing conflict over who gets to fertilize whose eggs is part of "an evolutionary arms race," in Birkhead's words, that is "every bit as ferocious as those between predators and prey and between parasites and their hosts." Female houseflies, in fact, get off relatively lightly. Male fruit flies also inject their mates with a substance, similar to spider venom, that is toxic to other sperm—and to the female fruit fly. This toxin significantly shortens the female's life span, but it guarantees that the eggs she lays will be fertilized by the first male to breach her defenses.

So much for cooperation between the sexes. An idyllic vision of males and females voluntarily working together to perpetuate the species may still endure in the public's mind, but it has been erased for scientists by study after study showing that reproduction is a selfishly motivated exercise. Sometimes the interests of the two sexes coincide, creating the illusion of cooperation, but most of the time, each individual is out to get the best deal—even at the expense of his or her partner.

Males are not the only players with deadly moves in this battle for reproductive leverage, as the female praying mantis reminds us. In about one-third of all praying mantis copulations, the male is killed and eaten, and the nutrients his carcass provides enable the female to produce more eggs. Though it was once thought that the male praying mantis sacrificed himself willingly to his mate, recent observations reveal that he does everything in his power to avoid being caught in her deadly embrace. But even if the female snares him and begins to eat him, he is still perfectly able to transfer his sperm. Headless, he goes into sexual overdrive.

Promiscuity is as densely packed with stories about sexual adaptation as a teaspoon of semen is with sperm, but Birkhead, a professor of behavioral ecology and a leading expert in bird reproduction, does not aim simply to regale us with tales of these weird and wonderful goings-on. Rather, he sets out to fit these individual behaviors into a context, surveying the history of reproductive biology and describing the latest studies in the field, discussing sperm competition between males and, most provocatively, the mechanisms of female choice before and even after insemination, tantalizing the reader with the possibility that females do exert significant power over the reproductive act.

For sperm competition to exist in nature, and for females to be theoretically capable of choosing sperm after insemination, females must mate with more than one male. So before scientists could begin to think about and look for these phenomena, they had to abandon long-cherished views of female monogamy and fidelity. The title of Birkhead's book doesn't refer to male behavior—or it doesn't refer exclusively to male behavior, since everyone seems to accept that males are promiscuous—but to female behavior, to when and why females choose to mate with more than one partner. Darwin assumed that females were monogamous and that sexual selection operated only up to the point when an individual acquired a mate, and this view received both support and clarification from the work of Robert Trivers in the 1970s. Trivers was one of the first to see that the female tendency toward monogamy stems not from any innate prudery but from the enormous investment that females make in their large, nutritious, life-sustaining eggs.

Susan Allport is the author of *A Natural History of Parenting* and *The Primal Feast.*

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As Birkhead points out, however, there was always a fatal flaw in any fixed and absolute view of female monogamy. If the numbers of males and females in a species are approximately equal, how is it that most males copulate with many females, but most females copulate with only one male? The numbers just don't add up.

For a while scientists balanced their equations with the idea that females simply acquiesced in extra matings, "that they lay back and thought of England." Such thinking prevailed until the 1980s, when researchers studying bird behavior in the wild noticed that females sometimes actively sought out matings with males other than their own partners. An important turning point was a 1988 paper by Susan Smith of Mount Holyoke College in which Smith showed that most of the extrapair copulations among black-capped chickadees took place inside the extrapair male's territory, a fact that strongly suggested the female had gone looking for illicit sex. Support for this changing view of female nature came from studies of the blue tit, in which females were observed initiating extrapair copulations, and from rapid advances in DNA technology that made paternity studies increasingly easy to conduct. Now that their eyes have been opened to the possibility of female promiscuity, biologists are discovering that it is more the rule than the exception. And they have been finding that competition for mates has an impact both inside and out, shaping the reproductive tracts of animals as well as their external features.

Nobody is suggesting that females are promiscuous for the same reasons that males are. They don't usually need to mate with more than one male in order to fertilize all their eggs. But multiple matings can sometimes improve the genetic quality of their offspring, or provide females with benefits in the form of food or paternal care. The swapping of sex for food is common and probably motivates most promiscuous behavior. In some species, females are able to digest excess sperm, and many cricket and grasshopper males produce a tasty, protein-covered spermatophore that simultaneously nourishes and impregnates their mates.

For some birds, multiple matings can mean multiple males helping to feed the chicks, but researchers have found that the amount of help a male is willing to give is strictly proportional to his access to the female during her fertile period. His willingness to take on the duties of fatherhood, in other words, has to do with his degree of certainty that he is indeed the father of the offspring.

There's the rub, of course. In species in which males help to raise their young, female promiscuity has its costs as well as its benefits, something Birkhead mentions in passing but that readers need to understand fully in order to put female behavior into perspective. Across the animal kingdom, male behaviors such as mate guarding, mating synchronization, copulatory plugs, and anti-aphrodisiacs are designed to reassure males of their paternity. Birkhead is correct in reasoning that none of these behaviors would be necessary if females were committed monogamists, but he fails to understand, or to point out, that promiscuity (at least after pair-bonding) is unlikely to be a common female strategy in a species, like ours, whose males help to care for their young for years longer than any other fathers on earth. Human females may choose to be promiscuous, of course, but if promiscuity were truly as prevalent as Birkhead implies with his frequent mentions of cuckolded husbands, male care would not have evolved to its present point.

It may be politically correct to present females as being as promiscuous as males; it may please those who would deny that biology counts in social relations; but it is a flaw in an otherwise informative and highly readable book. Human families (and the male-female relationships at their core) are fragile enough without encumbering them with beliefs that run counter to the true history of their evolution.

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THE READER REPLIES

THE WORK OF MOURNING

The usefulness of juxtaposing Freud and Homer in Francine du Plessix Gray's column on mourning (Summer 2000) finds a vivid and moving confirmation in the figure of King Priam in the *Iliad*. Priam, father of innumerable sons, loses Hector, his best beloved, and then loses himself in mourning. In Robert Fagles's translation, he is "buried, beaten down in the cloak that wrapped his body," dung smeared thick on head and neck, dung that he himself "scraped with his own hands, groveling in filth." The old man, once a towering king, is the image of melancholia: sleepless, inconsolable, he rages against himself, his wife and sons all huddled about him, "deep in the courtyard, robes drenched with tears."

Iris, "racing the wind," brings a message of mercy to Priam. In Zeus's name she urges him to prepare the ransom of "royal Hector." Now in the majesty of Priam's supplication, Homer introduces the idea of a "smooth-running wagon." This homely wagon becomes an image, an agent of recovery, that confirms Freud's insights about the work of mourning—"hard, slow, patient *work*, a meticulous process," Gray writes, quoting Freud's injunction that it must be "carried out 'piecemeal,' 'bit by bit,'" as the "slow, long-drawn-out and gradual work of severance."

The image of the wagon arises at the end of Homer's poem. The wagon is "trundled out" from stables, and carries the work of grief through its association with stored wealth—cloth and gold piled high, rich brocades from "the carved lids of chests"—that speaks for memories buried in time, as yet unveiled. The motif of craft, in the double sense of workmanship and cunning, marks the object: the wagon is "a good smooth-running one, / newly finished, balanced and bolted tight"; further, the action of journeying in the wagon, of carrying treasures across dark plains, requires the draft of quick thinking: as darkness descends, Priam's herald cries out, "Danger, my king—think fast." This episode of ransom and rescue appears shot through with an unlikely mix of prudence and daring as Priam, prostrate, rushes to climb aboard, cracking the lash, moving from abjection—"groveling in filth"—to upright action so as to ransom his son, thereby, as Freud advises, rescuing himself, his house, his lineage.

For the homely wagon, with its "well-made cradle," articulates a deep, more extensive recovery than even that of Hector's body. The attention paid to the building of the wagon—yoke lifted and wedged, rings fitted, pole "sanded and tapered," pommel strapped "with three good twists, both sides, and lashing made fast"—speaks to the very process of moving from grief—formless, fathomless, infinite—to the hard-won health and wholeness that Francine du Plessix Gray so movingly describes. Priam, lost in unspeakable rage and sorrow, finds rescue little by little—"piecemeal"—through the precious handiwork of that smooth-running wagon, and I think that nowhere else has the recovery from great grief received such exacting expression.

A recovery like Priam's takes time. And time is meted out amply in the outfitting of that wagon, each little piece, each part, each step presented in the fullness of painstaking efforts so essential to the task; none could ever be skipped or halfway done; no one piece could emerge less "sanded and tapered" than the other; all work in concert to move the wagon, bear the load of mourning, reaffirm the mission, in this effort rebuilding the very capacity that such a mission requires.

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So it is that Priam, once prostrate and dung-smeared, arises recovered to upright firmness. Now he will go, and the newly fitted wagon will take him there.

I believe this homely wagon contains the redemption that takes its place in our hearts when we suffer the experience of bereavement. Then we would do well to take small, deliberate steps, fitting yoke, rings, and shafts, finally piling upon the "well-made cradle" all we have been given—as Priam does when he throws in that great, golden Thracian cup—even as all has been taken away. The gift of the wagon, delivered to us in Robert Fagles's magnificent translation, offers as much guidance as it does consolation in the beauty of the words that hold it "trued to the line."

HARRIET TURNER
Lincoln, Nebraska

THE ELECTRONIC BOOK

One Saturday this summer I got license to fritter some money on a Rocket eBook; on the Monday following, the post brought the SCHOLAR, with D. T. Max's article "The Electronic Book."

Paper and board books will never go away entirely, but we are in the midst of a sea change, the beginning of a time when e-books will become prevalent. My Rocket eBook is a handy device; a little heavy, but easy to read and equipped with some useful features such as underlining and annotation. Annotating text is accomplished by pecking at a representation of a typewriter keyboard or by using its handwriting recognition engine; I prefer the latter method. In its present form, the Rocket eBook is best used as a text-only medium, though it can display simple line drawings. It allows one to travel light with a large quantity of reading material. It would serve editors and other wordsmiths well; from my computer I download my own texts to the eBook to proof and mark up at my leisure. One feature missing from the machine is the ability to beam unencrypted texts between Rocket eBooks via the infrared port: it would be an easy feature to add and distribute by an update to the operating system.

An e-book is no substitute for the comforting presence of books on shelves, but it is ideal for ephemeral work.

ANDREW DONOVAN-SHEAD
Tulsa, Oklahoma

D. T. Max's "The Electronic Book," while well written and carefully researched, is ultimately frustrating because it seems to throw up its hands in acceptance of the phenomenon of the e-book. Though Mr. Max is clearly skeptical about a world filled with e-books, he seems unwilling to follow that skepticism with critique. Instead of devoting his article to arguing against the e-book, he recounts conferences, meetings, and conversations. I realize that polemic has gone out of style, but must we really sit by passively as one of the most visible vestiges of our humanity is tossed onto the scrap heap of obsolescence? If you want to make your readers think, you ought to encourage your writers to take a stance and argue a point, not throw persuasion away at the same time the printed page disappears.

CHARLES CARROLL
New York City

THE COMPUTABLE COSMOS OF DAVID DEUTSCH

Out of bed for what was to be a moment in the wee hours, I glanced at Oliver Morton's piece on David Deutsch. I reached the article's end to realize I was still standing where I had begun—or perhaps in a nearly identical parallel universe.

This is the finest popular science writing I've encountered in many a moon. While Morton's prose is not as indulgently florid as the redoubtable David Berlinski's, and though he may not bring the extensive working background in physics of Jeremy Bernstein, I found the piece's lucidity and flow exhilarating. The ideas are so fascinating that I've even ordered the Deutsch book cited, and vow that a recently acquired Wheeler autobiography not languish unread.

BRAD WOOD
Chatsworth, California

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Oliver Morton's essay inspired a little poem:

I crawled around in Hilbert space
Seeking a qubit or two
When I realized the awful truth
That you were never you.
Then was I ever I or me?
Or did someone else pretend to be?
In Hilbert space it all comes true
You are me and . . . I am you.

CARROLL G. BRIGGS
San Juan Bautista, California

LIKE HYENAS, LIKE BAUDELAIRE, LIKE THE ANGEL OF RESURRECTION

Andrew Hudgins's well-crafted account of his religious peradventures impressed me. Religion should be neither more nor less than honest and truthful. Although my own religious experience came from a different kind of emotional and intellectual skepticism, we seem to share the conviction "'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' saith the Lord." Those Christians who helped others through the Cyprian plague could live in hope that the ordeal would soon be over; the most zealous religious service springs from need as well as virtue. Mr. Hudgins's discernment of the fate of the preacher suggests to me that our spiritual leaders are not interpreting the present time but subverting the great spiritual teachings to politics. Like Hudgins painting his father's house, we must all be forgiven for not doing a particularly good job in the places we can't reach.

ARTHUR H. KING, JR.
Audubon, New Jersey

THE SOUL OF PLUTARCHOS

My wife and I so enjoyed Brian Doyle's essay on Plutarch that we were inspired to pluck down from the shelf, where it had snoozed since 1955, our copy of the Dryden/Clough translation in the Modern Library edition.

Motivated by Doyle's spirited descriptions, we tried reading Plutarch/Dryden/Clough aloud—starting with Marius and intending to go on to Sulla, Crassus, Pompey, Caesar, Cicero.

Twenty pages, total disillusionment.

Whereas in Doyle we find constant lively clarity, in this old tome we find swarms of passive past participial phrases; we meet pronouns time after time that require us to track down their antecedents, no matter how far into the thicket we must scurry; we encounter on almost every page narrative-destroying asides and enormous corpulent dependent clauses, dousing every small flame of enthusiasm with stifling Latinisms.

Cannot Doyle deliver a waiting humanity from this soupy mess? Cannot he continue his paraphrase, plucking out the jewels and draining off their surrounding sea of oatmeal?

We very much wish he would do so, as a multitude doubtless awaits the good stories that have been cruelly imprisoned in this veritable black hole of periphrasis.

TED ZIEGLER
Colorado Springs, Colorado

PROVINCETOWN

David Michaelis's "Provincetown Journal" is a beautiful piece of work, palpably vivid, intense, moving, and haunting. Michaelis speaks deeply and truly not only to those of us who know Cape Cod, but also to anyone who has left his roots and gone back later to revisit a vanished world.

Thirty years after leaving Birmingham, I returned to show my family the house I'd known as a child, across the threshold of which I hadn't stepped since I was eleven: the way the light came through the cellar window, the glass plates for the hand to push open the breakfast room door, the creek in the woods out back. And now, these several years later, David Michaelis has written with wonderful sensitivity for each of us who has ever made such a pilgrimage, for each of us—who isn't included?—who has felt guilt and suffered loss.

PHILIP MCFARLAND
Lexington, Massachusetts

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The Podium

The Dying Kiss

SANTANU DAS

After his close friend, Jim Noone, was killed in France in July of 1915, Lance Corporal D. H. Fenton wrote to Jim's mother, "I held him in my arms to the end, and when his soul had departed I kissed him twice where I knew you would have kissed him—on the brow—once for his mother and once for myself."

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—from a talk delivered on July 1, 2000, at "The Kiss in History," a conference at the Institute of Historical Research in London

Santanu Das is a Benefactors' Scholar at St. John's College, Cambridge, and a Fellow of the Cambridge Commonwealth Society.

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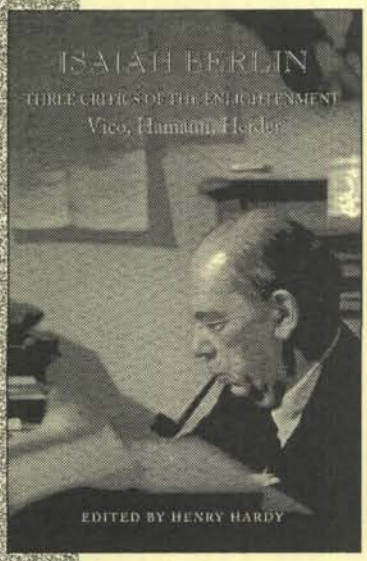

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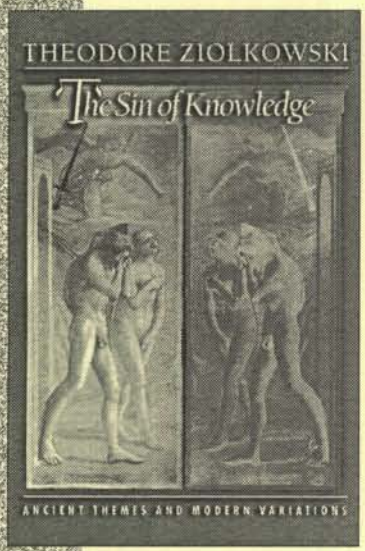

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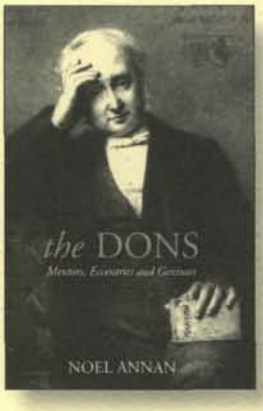

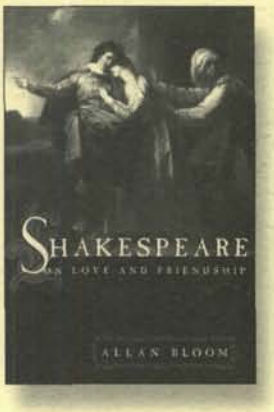

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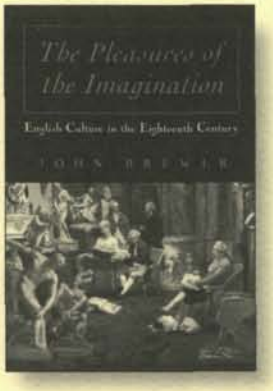

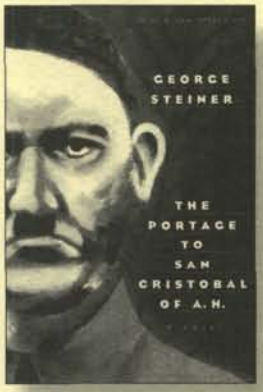

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